

Changing of the Seasons

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Changing of the Seasons

by [Poker](#)

Summary

A place for one shots set within The Snow King universe such as unofficial endings, stories from the past, and whatever inspires me to write.

Notes

As always, kudos/bookmarks/comments are always appreciated! I hope you guys enjoy!

Unofficial Ending: A Simple Solution

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Become my son.” Schlatt said. His thumb stroked along Tubbo’s jaw, a twisted gesture of affection. “My clever little goat kid. Everyone’s excited to fully meet you. Quackity has been wanting me to settle down for years and Fundy is excited to not be the youngest of the Court. But I never found anyone I liked until I met you.”

“People will miss me.” But as soon as he said it, Tubbo knows he’s wrong. Any family he had had died a long time ago, leaving him an orphan. For all their shenanigans, he and Tommy had drifted through the village like ghosts. At best, a cautionary tale, at worst, forgotten. Purpled and Ranboo had known him for all of an hour, at best. “I’ll miss them.”

“What have humans ever done for you? Tossed you into an orphanage and then pushed you into the streets as soon as possible.” Schlatt said, brutally honest. His grip tightened, stopping Tubbo from flinching away.

He fell silent for a moment as if thinking. “Do you miss them or do you feel like you have to miss them?”

Tubbo closed his eyes. He didn’t know how to answer that question but he felt like he should. Of course he should miss people. Even if their village visits were rare, he had talked to so many people.

But try as he might, he hadn’t really... connect with them. It was a distant sort of connection.

Did that make him a bad person?

Schlatt made a soft pleased sound at his silence, brushing a hand through his curls. “Wouldn’t you miss this place?”

More horrifyingly, Tubbo thought distantly, was that the answer to that question was yes. The Autumnal Groves were beautiful and despite the feeling being buried under fear, he was tempted.

The offer was tantalizing. So, so tantalizing. He had never expected to meet someone other than Tommy who saw him, all of him, and wanted that. Wanted the paranoid boy who lied as easily as breathing.

But he shouldn’t want that. He should miss people other than Tommy. That was, that was a human thing to do.

But if he was human, then shouldn’t he miss them? It was a Catch-22, an ouroboros that turned on itself. He shouldn’t want this offer because he was human, but he did.

There was a soft chiming sound but Tubbo was too distracted to notice. His eyes felt like they were burning.

It was too much. All the questions, the pain, the exhaustion dragging on him. It was *too much*. He felt like he was drowning under it all.

“Eyes on me.” He heard Schlatt say, tilting his head up. “C’mon, kid. Just a little bit longer.”

Tubbo half heartedly tried to pull his head away. He wanted to curl into a ball and panic, not listen to Schlatt until he hit another panic attack. Why wouldn’t the Fae leave him alone?

“You just have to do one thing for me.” Schlatt said, his voice low and persuasive. “And then this can be over. Kid, do you have an answer for your trial?”

And he didn’t. Tubbo sniffled, feeling so stupid. He didn’t have an answer. He was going to fail and that meant he was going to fail his quest and lose Tommy and he promised to help him promised to win he was the smart one so why couldn’t he think.

“C’mon match my breathing, kid.” Schlatt’s voice broke through the haze. Tubbo wheezed, trying to draw in air. “In, out, there we go.”

Tubbo slumped in Schlatt’s arms. He didn’t think he could move. “Don’t know.” He said dully.

“What was that?”

“I don’t know.” Tubbo said. He sniffled again. “I-I don’t know.”

The last word came out as a quiet whine. He’d failed. The second charm, and he’d already failed. “Guess I’m not so clever after all.”

“Don’t be like that, kid, you’re plenty clever.” Schlatt said. He wiped a tear away with his thumb. “I’m far far older than you. I’ve brought kingdoms to their knees and drove scholars mad. It was a loss written in the stars.”

But Tubbo hadn’t want- he wasn’t supposed to lose. This wasn’t how he wanted their story to go. He couldn’t want something like this.

“You know what comes next.” Schlatt’s voice was soft, coaxing. Tubbo tried to bury his head in his hands, ignoring the ache in his shoulder, but Schlatt batted them away. Forcing him to look. “You’ve lost.”

The forfeit.

As soon as Tubbo said it, it’d be true. He really had lost. He whimpered, feeling like the words were clogged in his throat.

Would Tommy be ashamed of him?

“No.” Had he said that out loud? Schlatt tapped the tip of his nose. “You got farther than most would have. And you’ve gained more in losing than you would have in winning.”

“I’ve lost him.” Tubbo whispered. They’d never go back to their home. He’d never be able to introduce Tommy to Purpled and Ranboo.

“No, you didn’t.” Schlatt said. “Like I said, Autumn and Winter are allies. You can visit each other to your heart’s content. Don’t you want to show your friend the grove?”

Tommy would love to build leaf piles.

Tubbo bit down on his lip, tasting blood. Would it... would it be that bad? The Autumn Fey weren’t kind but they wanted him. He and Tommy would be cared for and isn’t that something he should want? As a good friend and all but blood brother?

He didn’t know. He was too tired for this. It felt like he was about to sleep into dreams at any moment, hanging on by a thread. Tubbo yawned, hearing his jaw creak from how wide it was.

“I know, you’re tired.” Schlatt said. “You’ve had a very long day. But you need to pay the forfeit first.”

He couldn’t delay it any longer. He could already feel the magic working around his throat, the words on the tip of his tongue.

“Toby Underscore.” Tubbo whispered. Saying the words felt like flinging rocks into a pond. The pond would never be quite right again. He couldn’t take his Name back.

“Toby Underscore.” Schlatt purred. Tubbo let out a soft noise, feeling like someone had traced a static shock up his spine. “My new son.”

Tubbo whimpered as Schlatt stood, feeling fireworks of agony in his shoulder as he was lifted. He grabbed onto the back of Schlatt’s jacket, feeling the silky fabric bunch in his fists.

If he wasn’t so tired, he’d blush. He was curled up in Schlatt’s arms like a little child being carried to bed.

But if he was, his shoulder wouldn’t be hurting so much. “Careful.” Tubbo mumbled.

“Oh, that.” Schlatt said. His grip shifted and Tubbo shrieked as the pain flared before dying away. “Better, kid?”

Tubbo stayed quiet, a bit shaken at the sudden use of magic. His shoulder did feel better. It actually felt perfect. But Schlatt hadn’t even asked first.

“Answer me, Toby.”

“Yes, it feels great.” The words spilled out, uncontrollable. Tubbo’s grip tightened as he tried to recover from the alien shock. “Thank you.”

“That’s better.” Schlatt said, adjusting his grip before beginning to walk. Tubbo started to shake after a few steps. “None of that, kid. Thought your shoulder was feeling better.”

“I’m scared.” Tubbo said. He wasn’t compelled but the words spilled out anyways. Half of him wanted to sink into the warmth and accept this. The other half wanted to kick Schlatt and run. “For Tommy.”

And for himself.

“You don’t have to be jealous of Tommy.” But he wasn’t. He wasn’t jealous. Schlatt was twisting his words. “You’ll both be getting great families.”

“But m’not.” Tubbo said. He was scared for Tommy. Not jealous. Why would he be jealous of Tommy being kidnapped?

“You got left behind.” Schlatt said. And Tubbo know he was dancing around the truth. But Schlatt had a way of making it almost sound believable. “But you don’t have to be left behind now. You’ve got your own family out of this.”

Tubbo squeezed his eyes shut, giving up on the argument and burying his face in Schlatt’s shoulder. He ignored the soft chuckle.

Maybe if he ignored the kidnapping, Philza being Philza, the statues. Maybe he would be jealous if Tommy had been adopted into a normal family. But did that make him jealous now?

Some part of it... was a little tempting. Longing still tugged at his chest at the promises of love and family that Schlatt had made. Tempered by what that would mean for him but even now...

He wasn’t sure how to answer that. Thinking felt like trying to weave a basket while submerged in honey.

Tubbo made a disgruntled noise when he was jostled, yawning again. Without the quest to push him on, all of his exhaustion seemed to crash down on his shoulders. It was so tempting to give into the lull of Schlatt’s steady footsteps.

What could he do if he was awake, that devious little voice whispered. It was over. Schlatt had won, he had Tubbo’s Name, and now he was going to be-

Sleep tugged him further and further into its grasp. Muzzily, he was aware Schlatt had paused.

“He lost?” Someone said, pulling Tubbo out of his drift.

“Quiet.” Schlatt said. Tubbo tried to lift his head, only to have Schlatt gently push it back down. He gave in, letting his head flop back down. “He’s trying to sleep.”

“I see that.” The other person said. Tubbo made a disgruntled noise as someone patted his head, scrunching his face up. What was with Fey and touching him? “Aw, looks like

someone's grumpy."

"Stop teasing him, Quackity." Schlatt said. "We've got somewhere to be."

That tugged Tubbo back into the waking world. He opened his eyes, trying to look around as they walked. But Schlatt's grip kept his head firmly in place.

"Where are we going?" Tubbo asked. Schlatt was quiet. "Where?"

"To your room for now." Schlatt said. Tubbo felt his stomach lurch as the portal washed over him. "It's better to be comfortable when the process begins."

"When the process begins?" Tubbo said nervously. "I don't want- I don't- Please let go of me."

He squirmed in Schlatt's arms, kicking and twisting. Schlatt didn't even break stride. "It's okay, kid, calm down. I'll be with you every step of the way."

"But I don't want this!" Tubbo whined. He could feel tears threatening to fall again. "Please just- I'll be a servant or something like that, but I don't want to be changed."

"You're not going to be a servant." Schlatt said. His voice was completely unaffected by Tubbo's building panic. "It'll be over before you know it. Try to go back to sleep."

But Tubbo couldn't. He clung to being awake, fear creeping along the edges of his mind.

There was a soft click as a door swung open somewhere in front of them. Tubbo made a soft startled squeak as his hands were untangled from Schlatt's coat and he was lowered into a bed.

A plush one too. Tubbo sank into it as if it were made from clouds. The amount of pillows threatened to create an avalanche at any moment.

A bedroom, Tubbo noted. Tastefully decorated with thick tan carpets and the same walls as the throne room. Arching branches full of crimson leaves formed a canopy above the bed. Tastefully decorated but empty of anything personal as if it was still waiting for an owner.

Something inside of him screamed to take the opportunity to run. But it felt like his limbs were weighed down by rocks, pinning him to the soft surface of the bed.

Schlatt appeared over him. "This part is going to hurt a bit, kid." He said. A soft hand brushed over his forehead, brushing away his curls. "I'll be here for you."

It should terrify Tubbo that those words were actually comforting. Schlatt's hand brushed across Tubbo's forehead again before dropping lower, resting above Tubbo's heart. Tubbo swallowed, looking up at the crimson leaves.

He wanted to scream but who would hear him? This was where his quest would truly end. Not fighting with Philza but with the Autumn king whispering words of comfort.

The pain ripped through him like lightning and Tubbo screamed, trying to push Schlatt's hand away. Hands pressed down on his shoulders, a flash of golden wings.

It felt like a seed had sprouted in his chest, the roots winding around his heart and leaves filling his lungs. His mouth tasted like dead leaves and blood.

His vision blurred, kaleidoscoped, until Tubbo was forced to close his eyes. The pain surged and he screamed again. It felt like his head was splitting apart.

It was too much, he thought, fighting for breath. Whatever splinter of Autumn they had put inside of him, it wouldn't take. It's killing him.

There was a snapping sound like dry wood in a fire.

And then he collapsed back into the bed, exhaustion crashing over him like a wave. It hurt, gods how it hurt, but his body felt distant. Alien. It didn't feel like his.

"There we go. You're doing so good." He heard someone whisper. "Go to sleep. You'll wake when you're ready, my little prince."

Tubbo reached up, weakly fumbling at someone's jacket. Tubbo tugged. He didn't want the person to go. He didn't want to be alone.

"If that's what you want." Tubbo made a soft whining sound as he was lifted, and then tucked into someone's side. There was a soft creaking sound as someone sat down on his other side. The warmth pulled him further into sleep, away from the pain still threatening him. "Ready to sleep now?"

"Dun wanna." He whined. The words came out slurred and twisted. There was something... something bad about sleeping right now. Maybe. He couldn't think of what it was. "Gotta--"

"Go to sleep." The person said firmly. "Don't worry about the old stuff. When you wake, you won't even remember being mortal."

No, no he shouldn't forget that. That was important. Tubbo shook his head, but it was more of a weak floppy movement. If he fought past the exhaustion, the pain quickly followed. He slumped back against the bed with a whine. His head felt like someone had taken a hammer to both sides.

The other person reached up, tracing circles into the side of his head. "Looks like he's getting your horns." They remarked.

Horns. He had remembered seeing Schlatt's horns. That thought dragged him a bit further into the waking world.

"Why me." He whispered. Why, out of everyone, would they pick him.

There was a soft rumbling sound. "I could say it was because I could sense from the very first meeting that you were clever, determined, someone to watch. But what really got my

attention? It's because you looked me in the eyes and made me mad without caring what the consequences could be. After that, I started looking back."

At that, something in Tubbo finally broke.

He lost. All because of the games he played to win.

Schlatt had won instead. And every scrap of affection shown to Tubbo pulled him more and more into the web of the Autumn Court. Some desperate voice in his hindbrain was screaming, the last hold out. But he felt so warm, so safe, tucked in this bed. The pain couldn't reach him in his dreams, and he wouldn't care what he'd lost if he couldn't remember it.

Maybe... Maybe he should just try to make the best of it. At least he would be loved and cared for.

And now, with warm darkness closing in, he leaned into the hand stroking his head.

Maybe in another world, he had won.

Chapter End Notes

golden leaves cover the forest floor, their potential unrealized.

Q and A Answers!

Chapter Notes

You guys are still getting a chapter when I normally post them, but I'm posting this first.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

what is sbi doing during all of this?/also, is schlatt still keeping tabs on tubbo?

I actually had a partially written snippet that semi answers both of these questions.

“You just let him go?”

Schlatt rolled his eyes, not even looking up from the book he was writing in. He knew Wilbur would be draped over the table, frost beginning to seep over the surface. “Tone it down, drama queen.” He said.

Wilbur got up, beginning to pace. “I can’t believe you let him go! You had him right there! He was defenseless.”

“I know that.” Schlatt said. If he closed his eyes, he could still feel Tubbo in his arms, the delicious smell of fear flooding the air. The boy was even smaller than he first thought when he saw him curled up in a throne too big for him.

“Then why did you let him go?” Wilbur said. Schlatt looked down at his notebook, debating if Philza would go to war with him if he stuck Wilbur in a tree again.

Probably.

“Didn’t you want to kill him?” Wilbur said. “I mean, I can understand wanting to, he’s an annoyingly nosy brat-“

Wilbur stopped as a razor sharp leaf grazed his nose, the fire in his eyes icing over. “I see.” He said. There was the cold stick up his ass Winter prince that Schlatt knew. Wilbur turned back, tilting his head to the side. “You want him.”

“Maybe.” Schlatt said, leaning back in his chair. “You’ll need to pay for that information,”

“You’re infuriating.”

“And too busy to distract you.” Schlatt said. “Go back to pacing around your lands like the rest of your family.”

He had matters he’d much rather attend to. Like a certain runaway mortal.

Are u still updating changing of seasons/have you got any plans to add more one-shots to your one-shot book for this au?

Absolutely! I have some excerpts in progress for Changing of the Seasons.

What's your favourite c!Tubbo moment?

Well, this is gonna be a weird one but I like the peaches scene! <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=SpqeAwys0I>

It's pure, hilarious chaos

Was this book inspired by anything?/What inspired you to write this?/what gave you the inspo for this au?/What inspired you to write this fic?

This book was inspired by a prompt from JadeSpeedster17's first prompt collection! I really like fairy tale style stories, and I've read the Snow Queen before. I really liked the idea and asked for permission to use it for my own fic.

Out of all the characters, which dynamics to you personally like best with Tubbo? (eg, schlatt and tubbo, or dream and tubbo)

Tommy and Tubbo! They just have a very fun dynamic that's a lot of fun to write. It's definitely difficult to write sometimes but I love how they bounce off of each other.

Which seasonal court do you personally believe Tubbo resonates the most with?

He's kind of a mix of everything! Most mortals are pretty flexible, it's one of the attributes that set them apart from Fey. Smaller though is the number who can survive a transition from mortal to Fey.

Do you write consistently and with a plan, or just random bursts of productivity and inspiration?/is this fic planned or do you make it up as you go? If the former, how detailed is it?

I write fairly consistently to make sure chapters come out on time. I would say I do have a plan, but it's more of a roadmap. I know the ending and a handful of scenes between and a general idea of how to get from point A to point B. It works for me.

Do you have any plans on further exploring the fae!Tubbo mechanics?/Will that use of magic have a permanent effect on Tubbo??

;)

Aren't you tempted with each court to just let them adopt tubbo?

Oh, absolutely. It's why Changing of the Seasons came about, so I can write out all those alternate scenes that come up for me.

What will some of the alt chapters be about? (Or will we just have to wait and see?)

It varies! A few will be alternate endings, some will explore other choices Tubbo could have made, and I think I might also add some worldbuilding and background scenes I wouldn't get to write otherwise.

If Tubbo got adopted by a court, which one would you want it to be?

Personally, outside the story, I admit I lean a bit towards Autumn Court. It doesn't affect the story at all, but Schlatt and Tubbo's dynamic is very interesting. It was also the first trial I wrote so I have a soft spot for the Autumn Court.

Who's your favourite MCYT?

Skydoesminecraft! They were a bit controversial at points, but they were my first introduction to Minecraft YouTube and I've always held a soft spot for their old videos.

Who's your favourite character in Dream SMP lore?

Hmmmm. I'll have to say Fundy. He's got some really interesting lore and I like how he builds offhand jokes into serious lore.

when thinking up the premise for this fic, what was the first scene you thought of?

There's actually two answers for this! The first one I thought of was from Jadespeedster17's prompt, where Tubbo meets Philza and makes a deal. But the one I first thought of outside the prompt was most likely Tubbo's and Schlatt's confrontation at the end of his Autumn trial.

any interesting concepts you had but couldn't fit them in the fic thus far?

Backgrounds for characters! Particularly Fundy, Ranboo, and Purpled. I want to write them all out eventually.

and for reader/commenter convenience) what are your pronouns dear author?

Neutral pronouns are fine.

are the chapters pre-written? Since you stick to schedule so well and never sacrifice quality

Thank you! It varies based on how busy I am and writer's block. Sometimes I pre write, and sometimes I write and edit the chapter during the week before updating the Fic.

what are your favourite and least favourite parts of writing?

My favorite part is creating something I want to read. While I do like it when people like my work, ultimately, Snow King is what I want to see in a fanfic. It makes it fun to reread. But writer's block can really suck. I have ways to get around it, but still, it's my least favorite part about writing sometimes.

and your favourite part of the worldbuilding you've done?

I like working with the Fey mythology in this fic. Just the little tidbits I get to mix in such as the color red or Fae touched. I think it makes the overall worldbuilding even better and lets me add in some of the little facts I come up with.

have you written any other fics, or have fic recommendations?

I've written other fics for various fandoms but none for this genre. In terms of recommendations, JadeSpeedster17 has great prompt and oneshot collections. Orange Light(Painted by Morning Sun) by HoneyDew_Tea is also fantastic!

What does warping mean?

It means twisted or to be twisted by something. Usually into something abnormal or strange. That was just fancy wordplay on my part. I like using poetic language so I chose that instead of a synonym like 'twisting'.

For the Q&A I really have just one question, when Tubbo first met Dream, he was described as someone familiar. Was this because of George's description of Dream's fashion sense that made Tubbo somewhat recognize Dream before his reveal? Or is it something else?

Most of it was just the description of Dream's fashion sense. He's.... Pretty unique.

How the fuck do you lose an entire mountain/j *You forget to cherish it*

how do u write fey so well

I really like reading about characters who seem human but are just so... subtly off as you continue talking. The Fey have all been affected by the magical world of the Veil, their immortality, and the lack of human morals.

The important thing to remember is that they sound human because they want to. For their own reasons.

Chapter End Notes

It was fun answering these!

If you want to ask questions, feel free to comment them here or on other chapters of The Snow King. I may still answer them in end notes!

Alternate Ending: A Summer That Never Ends

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“There you go.” Dream said, sounding pleased. “I’m sure you can figure out how to use that.”

Tubbo nodded, not looking up from the Pearl. The more he looked at it, the more he could feel it. A chilly core that clashed oddly with the warmth in his chest.

He just had to reach out and grab it.

Tubbo thought of endless twilight, the flickering static, the golden sand, the cold blood on his hands-

For a moment, something screams in the back of his mind and his grip begins to loosen. What was he doing? Why was he doing what Dream said?

And then he feels a slight breeze and throws himself out of the way of a blade. Tubbo let out a strangled gasp as a spreading feeling of cold slips up his forearm, the Pearl beginning to crumble.

I’m so sorry, Tommy, he thought. He had a good feeling that this wouldn’t end well. Would it kill him? Tear him apart, burn him from the inside out?

Instead, incredible warmth settles in his chest. Magic. Real magic, not the borrowed kind he was using earlier with the Blaze rod. Actual magic of his own.

He could finally go toe to toe with Dream! And just in time.

He bares his teeth, meeting Dream’s eyes. “You cheated.” Tubbo snarled. Not in the words, but it felt wrong for Dream to try and hit him then. He couldn’t put his fingers on it but he knew that for a fact.

“You took too long.” Dream said, hefting the axe in his hand. He tilted his mask, looking Tubbo up and down. “Got a bit of fire in you now, don’t you?”

Oh, Dream was going down.

But... maybe not yet? Tubbo wanted to enjoy this magic more. And what better way to practice than to use it now? After all, he had plenty of room to practice.

Tubbo reached for that cold magic ~~no-WAIT-~~ and feels the world change around him. He laughs as he tumbles down the side of a sand dune. Tubbo let out a small grunt of pain as his head spun with vertigo, likely from his fall, before clearing away.

Teleportation! He could think of so many things to do with this!

Someone- someone would have loved to see this. But who? Before Tubbo could think of it, an Ender Pearl hit the ground behind him and he teleported again.

He sprints across the sand, hearing the soft noise of an Ender Pearl breaking. Another dizzying shift and he's further away, crouched by the base of an obsidian pillar.

Tubbo grins as he peers around it. "Oh, Tubbo!" He heard Dream call in the distance. "Where'd you go? Still running away?"

"More like running with style." Tubbo says, leaning against the pillar, wheezing slightly. Fatigue washed over him for a moment, making him sag against it. Should he have said that? On one hand, Dream definitely knew where he was, but on the other, hiding felt boring.

He feels magic crackle across his fingertips. After all, now he had magic too. What was the point of hiding when you could actually play?

After all, if a Fey king loved this game ~~this is not a game~~, surely there had to be some merit, right?

Tubbo whirls away from Dream's next strike, laughing. "Having fun?" Dream said, dusting sand off his shoulders. Tubbo reaches down and grabs more sand, tossing it at him.

Dream takes another swing at him, Tubbo dodging away with a laugh.

Before he could dodge the next, his head bursts into pain and Tubbo gasps. The only thing that saved him was his ankle buckling, sending him under Dream's next strike.

Something screams in the back of his mind, something he forgot. Tubbo let's out a short moan, pushing himself backwards. He didn't want to remember it if it hurt this much. ~~NO-~~

As if by magic, his headache clears. Tubbo craves a moment to rest, catch his breath, but then the blade is coming back and Tubbo spun right back into his place for the game. All thoughts of forgetting something go right out the window.

"Maybe not." Tubbo taunts, letting his next flare place him by an empty fountain, some kind of skeleton hanging around it. "You're so boring!"

"Say you." Dream said. But there's a bit of playfulness to it.

Of course there was playfulness in his voice. They were playing a game, weren't they? ~~no we're not, he's trying to kill you.~~

"I bet I could win right now." Tubbo mumbled. He certainly felt like he could win right now. It felt like all of the exhaustion and pain from before had simply dropped away.

The once heavy heat had shifted into something far more pleasant. Magic crackled across his hands, preparing to shift him to another location.

Dream had to be in a good mood from this game. It gave him a strange sense of pride. The Fey King tilted his head to the side, watching him.

“You can’t.” Dream said. And Tubbo wheezed as Dream was suddenly in front of him, burying the blade into his chest. The magic crackled once before dissipating.

Something’s screaming in the back of his head but Tubbo can’t pay it any attention, staring down at the blood staining his clothes. He doesn’t feel any pain. When does the pain kick in?

Oh.

Right now. Tubbo crumpled to the ground, gasping in pain. He choked as blood began to rise up his throat, filling his mouth with its coppery tang.

Warm arms wrapped around him before he could fall, gently lowering him to the ground, his head in Dream’s lap. Dream combed a bloodstained hand through Tubbo’s hair. Golden flame curled around him like a cloak, lighting up the area around them.

Dream said something Tubbo didn’t catch. He feels oddly floaty. Tired.

“Did you have fun?” Dream repeats and Tubbo stares up at him, not understanding. The hand tightens on his hair, the pain almost unnoticeable next to the burning feeling in his chest.

He hadn’t pulled the axe out yet. That was unpleasant to look at.

“Did you have fun?” Dream said, his tone icy.

“I guess.” Tubbo slurs. He’s rewarded with a hand gently patting his head. “Why now?”

Why kill him when the game is finally getting good? The magic didn’t come now when he called it. Maybe it had bled out of him when Dream’s blow landed.

“You’re not allowed to win.” Dream said as if he was a foolish little child. “You’re not allowed to even come close.”

“Why?” Tubbo said stubbornly. He did so good when he- when he-

He couldn’t quite remember why he started playing this game. ~~For Tommy~~. Whoever invited him was- was-

A flash of golden hair. A hazy memory of running through a forest, someone at his side. But it slipped away before he could grasp it.

Golden hair. Did Dream ask him to play?

“Because you’re not allowed.” Dream said. “And now that you’ve lost, you get to play in my games forever and ever. Doesn’t that sound much better than what you picked?”

~~Nononono- Tommy he needed to save Tommy-~~

Maybe it would if Tubbo could even remember what he picked. “Wanted to win.” He said stubbornly.

“I know you do.” Dream said. The flickering flames kept drawing Tubbo’s eyes, he had to fight to look at Dream. “But this is better for you.”

Tubbo made a disgruntled noise, making Dream laugh. “You’re not going to understand it right now.” He said, tilting Tubbo’s head. “I’m shocked you’re even still conscious right now. I bet you can barely think straight.”

“M thinking fine.” Tubbo mumbled. But darkness was beginning to press in around the edges of his vision.

Distantly, he knew he should be afraid. He was dying. With every beat of his traitorous heart, he lost more and more blood.

But no fear appeared. Other than the pain, he almost felt tranquil about the possibility of death. It was a good game. Didn’t that make this result worth it?

“Go to sleep.” Dream said gently. His hand started combing through Tubbo’s hair again. “It’ll make this process a lot easier. You got yourself pretty far, now it’s time for me to step in.”

Step in? Step in for what? But speaking felt like a colossal challenge. He could barely even keep his eyes open right now.

“I wonder what you’ll inherit.” Dream said to himself. “I’m sure either way, you’ll always be great fun.”

Something about that set his alarm bells ringing but he was too sleepy to care. “The quicker you sleep, the quicker you get to play.” Dream said. “And if you’re good, maybe I’ll let you play with the new Winter Prince.”

Tubbo was- *golden flickering flames, lighting up the darkness creeping in*- wasn’t sure who that was. But it certainly sounded nice. He had played the game well. He definitely deserved a nap.

With a quiet yawn, he settled back in Dream’s lap, feeling his eyes slip closed. He wasn’t quite sure what would come next, but he was curious.

Chapter End Notes

sand drifts, hiding away what once could have been an ally

A Child's Choice

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“I’m sorry, Tubbo. I know you were very attached to him. But it’s a good thing he was adopted.” Tubbo scowled, staring up at the orphanage lady.

“I know it’s a good thing.” He said waspishly. As much as he loved Tommy, he wanted the other to get the family he wanted, even if it wasn’t with him. “I’m just wondering how he got adopted in the middle of the night and I didn’t even notice even though we sleep in the same room!”

Nobody got adopted in the middle of the night here. It happened sometimes, in very exciting stories, he knew. But their orphanage was boring and shut its doors right before dusk no matter what.

“I’m sorry, Tubbo. I know you were very attached to him. But it’s a good thing he was adopted.”

“Are you even listening to me?” Tubbo asked, scowling. The orphanage lady blinked but didn’t reply.

Something was up and this confirmed it. He already thought it was kind of weird he woke up and found Tommy missing. It got even weirder when the orphanage lady was now repeating the same thing.

“I’m sorry, Tubbo. I know you were very attached to him. But it’s a good thing he was adopted.”

“Fine, I’ll figure it out myself.” Tubbo snapped, turning around and taking a step away. He paused.

There was an iron horseshoe above the matrix’s door. He knew this because he and Tommy had to take it down and polish it when they were being especially bad. He’d wanted to burn it.

It was gone.

When he looked at the waste basket, he could see a bit of iron peeking out, heavily rusted and clearly broken off from a whole.

“I’m sorry, Tubbo. I know you were very attached to him. But it’s a good thing he was adopted.” When he looked back, the matron was staring at when he had been standing.

Glamour. There could be nothing else. He had heard about it in the really scary stories but he’d never thought he’d see it. Tubbo shivered. There was nothing he could do to help her.

Victims either got over it on their own or didn't.

Ignoring the pressing sense of guilt, he quietly slipped out of the room. He had grown up things to deal with now.

If the matron had been glamourised over this, that meant that a Fae had stolen Tommy. Which meant that of course, like the stories, Tubbo had to go rescue him!

First, he needed to get information. He hadn't seen anything weird in their room earlier so he doubted another look would find anything.

He knew there was a hunter in town. They came every year to scribble weird symbols in paint and refused to explain them no matter how much he and Tommy had pestered.

Said weird symbols weren't helpful now but maybe the hunter would know who would have stolen his friend.

He snuck out the back door, heading for one of the holes in the fence. Technically, they weren't supposed to sneak out or they'd lose their supper but he was pretty sure getting his friend stolen justified it.

And besides, no one was around to yell at him for it. That was practically permission.

Tubbo squirmed through the hole, looking around. Now how was he supposed to find a hunter in this big town?

By going to the nastiest smelling place he had ever seen. He had to sneak in under the nose of the owner as a big crowd walked in. Tubbo wrinkled his nose, primly hopping up on the empty seat next to the hunter.

The hunter turned to stare at him, blind eyes gazing emptily. "What do ya want?" The hunter slurred. Tubbo leaned away as the hunter's drink nearly sloshed out of his cup.

"Do any of the Fey adopt children?" He asked, making his voice just a little bit lower like he heard the adults use. He didn't want to be here any longer than necessary and he was sure the hunter would tell someone if he thought there was a kid here.

The hunter grunted. "They steal 'em, yeah. Put them to work or twist them into playing their little games. Big joke to the tossers to wait till a century passes and then tossing a kid into the shell of their old home."

"No, like adoption adoption." Tubbo pressed, though he filed that information away. Glamouring the matron to believe Tommy had been adopted seemed like rather a lot of effort to steal a kid for a game.

The hunter squinted at him, staring above his head. "Heard some of them do." He grumbled, taking a long sip. "Twist them into their own little monsters as if killing them wasn't bad enough."

"Who would?" Tubbo kept pressing.

“How the fuck would I know?” The hunter slurred. “Winter Court’s closest but the Autumn King lurked around orphanages sometimes. Could be any of the bastards. Ya done with your little quizzing session or do I gotta give ya a good kick to send you on your way?”

“No need.” Tubbo said, slipping out of his seat. He had everything he wanted to know. He stayed low to the ground, skirting around the boisterous groups gathered around tables.

He breathed a sigh of relief when he broke back into the bright daylight and clean air of the outside. Adults were weird. Why any of them enjoyed that place, he would never understand.

But now he had information! Not confirmation, but he’d narrowed it down to two Courts.

The Winter Court seemed more likely, Tubbo said, heading towards the edge of town. And he knew of a spot where dumb little kids got snatched away. The matron’s assistant had used it to scare them all into behaving but Tubbo had remembered where it was.

Just inside the edge of the forest, under the low branches of a massive pine tree. Tubbo slowed to a stop, looking around.

Was he just supposed to wait here? Did he need a sign? Or to yell? Should he say he was a gullible kid ready to be snatched? Or should he just say he was looking for a friend?

People never needed to deal with this kind of stuff in the stories.

“Hello?” Tubbo said quietly. He cleared his throat, trying not to squeak. “I’m looking for Tommy? Or whoever might have taken him?”

Nothing. Tubbo scowled, even checking behind the tree. This was so unfair, everyone else had gotten stolen so easily and he was having to stand her and wait!

He kicked at the snow. Maybe since they had gotten Tommy, they didn’t want another seven year old? Ugh, was he going to have to visit the nasty place again?

“I admit, I wasn’t expecting you to come.” Tubbo jumped, squeaking as his legs nearly slid out from under him. Behind him, he could hear soft laughter and Tubbo turned to face them.

Tubbo knew, logically, that Tommy had been taken by the Fey. But didn’t prepare him for seeing one in person.

He expected more fangs and claws and stuff.

The man in front of him had dark brown eyes and curly brown hair, with a small tuft at the front being white. His skin was deathly pale, paled even further by the white and blue clothing he was wearing.

“So, you weren’t fooled by the glamour.” The man said, tilting his head to the side to regard Tubbo. “I half expected that, but I admit, I would have thought you’d remain in safety.”

“Why?” Tubbo said, indignantly. This was about Tommy! Of course he’d want to make sure Tommy was safe. They were best friends!

“That’s what you mortals always do.” The man said. “Cower and pretend that good things happen, that there are no monsters that go bump in the dark.”

“So, you’re planning to do something bad to Tommy?” Tubbo said, glaring at the Fae. He wouldn’t hesitate to bite him if they were.

“No!” The Fae snapped. “Of course you would jump to conclusions like that. After all, I’m just a monster.”

...But he kinda said he was one before? He was really getting confused by this conversation.

“What do you want with Tommy?” Tubbo said. He couldn’t let the Fae distract him from what was really important!

“Like the matron said, we’re adopting him.” The Fae said. “Helping him leave his place as a disgusting mortal and take his rightful place as our little brother.”

Tubbo reared back in shock. He’d known, yeah, that Fey would turn a human into a child. Even the hunter had said so. But he kinda assumed those were one of those scary things adults said to frighten dumb kids.

“Well, give him back!” Tubbo said. He wanted Tommy back! Why should these Fey be allowed to steal him? “Or I’ll fight you!”

The Fae snorted. “Maybe I should introduce myself.” He said lazily. “I’m Wilbur, prince of the Winter Court.”

Oh. Uh. He hadn’t been expecting that. He knew Wilbur showed up in stories and they definitely had not been the nice stories.

Tubbo yelped as a cold hand grabbed his curls, pulling his head up to look Wilbur in the eye. “The only reason I’m letting you live is because Tommy liked you.” Wilbur said, his smile cold. “And I’m telling you all this so you’ll think twice before trying anything foolish.”

“He’s ours and he will remain ours. Already, he’s far enough along the road of becoming that there is no turning back. He’s not yours anymore.”

“Tommy is my friend.” Tubbo said. They’d promise to stick together, no matter what. He couldn’t let him go.

“Was.” Wilbur corrected. “He was your friend. As long as you’re mortal, you will never see him again. I don’t want you to taint our sunshine with your disgusting grime.”

Tubbo yelped as he was pushed down into the snow. He froze, staring up at Wilbur.

“Run along back to your little life.” Wilbur said, his lip curling. “And forget about him. This is the last mercy that I will give you.”

Tubbo closed his eyes as a cold breeze whipped through the air. When he opened them again again, Wilbur was gone.

He slowly pushed himself up to his feet, shivering at the dampness of his clothes. But he didn't have time to think about that! He needed to plan!

Plan what?

Tubbo rubbed his chin. Could he try making a deal to rescue Tommy like they did in the stories? He looked down at the snow and winced.

The people in the stories were mighty knights and cool alchemists. He was a scrawny seven year old who was one stiff breeze away from falling over. He'd have no chance.

And anyways, Wilbur the jerk had said what they were doing was irreversible. So he'd get Tommy back but it would be Tommy the Fae and then the Winter Court would tear him apart.

He didn't want to be torn apart. He liked all of his limbs being in the right spots.

Tubbo huffed, kicking the snow. But he couldn't just let Tommy go like this. They'd stuck together for years now, best friends through thick and thin. If he had been taken, Tommy would have done anything to reunite with him.

For some reason, his thoughts kept darting back to what Wilbur had said. *As long as you're mortal.*

Did that mean if he wasn't mortal, he could see Tommy?

The hunter had said the Autumn King lurked around orphanages sometimes. In fact, the Autumn King would have been his next stop if he survived the Winter Court with no leads. That implied he might be looking for a human kid to adopt as well.

It was a stupid idea. A foolish one as Wilbur had said. He wasn't really a super special kid, never one that the scarce families visiting the orphanage had cooed over.

But Tubbo didn't want to lose his friend and risking everything was the last choice he had.

He turned, trudging off and hoping he was going the right direction. It was going to be a long walk until Autumn.

And it was. But the time the trees began to change, Tubbo was wheezing slightly, his feet dragging a bit as he walked. How much further did he need to go?

He raised his head, relieved to see the brilliant red and orange leaves of fall. Tubbo took a deep breath, his tummy rumbling at the smell of gingerbread. He loved the taste of gingerbread. Maybe if he was a good kid, he'd get a bite.

The rustling of leaves was all the warning he got before a fox slipped onto the path, its brown eyes far too intelligent for its species.

"Hello." Tubbo said because you have to have manners when talking to the Fey.

"Hello." The fox said, creeping closer. "What brings a bite-sized morsel like you out here?"

“I’m Schlatt’s kid.” Tubbo said with the confidence of a child who had full faith in his plan. The fox stumbles, nearly tripping over his paws. “Are you alright?”

“Yeah, I-“ The fox looks at him, clearly befuddled. He recognized the look from people who visited the orphanage before. “Wait, what?”

“Are you alright?” Tubbo repeats patiently.

The fox shook his head, an odd motion on a four legged animals. “No, back up. You’re Schlatt’s kid?” They said. “You’re uh. You’re human.”

“That’s rude.” Tubbo said patiently. “Do you know where he is?”

“Yeah.” The fox said. “Of course I know where he is. But seriously, let’s address that first part.”

“Can you take me to him?” Tubbo asked. The fox looked up at him for a long moment before shaking his head.

“You know what, yeah. He can deal with you.”

The walk was definitely nicer with company. Fundy, the fox, seemed a bit preoccupied but he let Tubbo ask him all sorts of questions so Tubbo decided that he was still nice anyways.

They stop in front of an absolutely huge tree. Tubbo whistled, looking up. This tree had to be over a hundred times his size! No, even bigger!

“Wait here.” Fundy said. “I’ll go get Schlatt.”

“Okay.” Tubbo said, gasping when Fundy walked right into the tree. Could he do that?

He put a hand out to test it before immediately pulling it back and looking around. No one was here. Surely it would be alright if he hopped in really quick and hopped out super fast. No one had to know.

Tubbo took a step forward, wobbling as the world turned topsy turvy. It made his stomach feel sick like the time he ate moldy bread and was sick for a week.

Unfortunately for his plan, he crashed head first into something. Tubbo shook his head dazedly, looking up.

Tubbo could almost mistake him for human with his messy brown hair and the stubble on his face. But the broad ram horns and glowing amber eyes with horizontal pupils told a different story.

“You’re Schlatt.” Tubbo declared. No point in pretending he didn’t do it now.

“And you’re the kid claiming to be my child.” Schlatt said. Tubbo shrugged. “What’s to say I shouldn’t kill you for the offense?”

“You won’t.” Tubbo said confidently. He had already worked it all out. “Or you would have done it already. I know you want a kid. I want to get adopted. It all works out.”

“Bold words.” Schlatt said, chuckling. Tubbo wasn’t sure if that was a good or a bad thing. “But that doesn’t explain why that child should be you.”

“You don’t have to adopt me.” Tubbo said. He just needed to stay and not be mortal anymore. “I’m pretty good at reading and the matron said my memory is really good and that I can do maths once I get to school. So I can be useful too.”

He shrugged, a bit unsurprised to have to pull that card. Most of the families who visited the orphanage hadn’t been interested in him for longer than a moment. Too weird for the families who wanted a pretty, behaved child to show off, too placid for the families looking for a wild child to groom into a fighter.

“And I can run messages too.” Tubbo said. The matron had him do that a lot.

“Really.” Schlatt said. There was an odd look in his eyes. “You’d willingly offer yourself up as my servant?”

Tubbo considered it before nodding. As long as he could see Tommy sometimes, it would be worth it. “Yes.” He said. “And if you won’t take me, then I’ll just go to the Summer Court or the Spring Court.”

That’s what’s called a competing offer, he knew. It was important when you were asking for a job. Tubbo saw one of the people at the village do it once and they apparently stayed and got more money for their job!

“Really the kid thing was because Fundy was planning to kill me.” Tubbo said. He wanted Schlatt to know he was smart, could plan well, could be useful.

“Really.” Schlatt said. “And how do you know that?”

“I hadn’t left the path.” Tubbo said. “So why would a Fae approach me? In all the stories, they either want something or want a fight. I had nothing he’d want so clearly he was going to get me in trouble and then get revenge.”

He’d seen kids doing that at the orphanage. Purposely picking on someone before families would arrive so they’d go crying to the matron and the bullied kid would get sent away from the big meeting.

“Last question.” Schlatt said and Tubbo fidgets a bit, unsure. “Why are you doing this?”

The words are so tempting, so warm that Tubbo feels the words spill out before he can mask them in pretty language. “Cuz the Winter Court took my friend and said I can’t see him if I’m mortal.” He said. “So I can’t be mortal anymore cuz I want to see him.”

And to his eyes, Schlatt actually laughed. “Fine then.” He said. Tubbo yelped as warm arms wrapped around him, picking him up and tenderly cradling him against Schlatt’s chest. “I’ll make your lie true and adopt you.”

“Really?” Tubbo said. He wasn’t really expecting this result.

“Really.” Schlatt said. “You will be my son and I will look after you no matter what. You will no longer have to be mortal.”

And maybe Tubbo should be concerned, but really he’s just so relieved that he won’t die or lose Tommy. He lets himself slump a bit, feeling the nervous energy that’s been pushing him forward leave him. “Okay.” He said. “I believe you.”

“Damn, kid. You’re light.” Schlatt said. He turns, walking further into the weird tree area. Tubbo yawned. “I’ll have to feed you up before the Court thinks I adopted a skeleton.”

“Can I have gingerbread?” Tubbo mumbled. He yawned again, letting his cheek rest against the cool fabric of Schlatt’s fancy suit.

“Sure, kid.” Schlatt said. A warm hand patted his curls and Tubbo leaned into it. He felt himself getting lowered onto a bed that felt more like a cloud. “I just need one last thing from you.”

“What?” What was left of him to offer?

“Your True Name.” Schlatt said. Tubbo thought about it for a long moment, some last bit of self preservation blaring warning. That he would give up everything if he did this.

But he knew the risks already when he came here to offer himself.

“Toby Underscore.”

“Stop squirming.” Tubbo whined, head butting his Dad’s leg.

“But it’s cold.” Tubbo whined. He grinned as his words finally got the effect he wanted, his Dad’s warm coat draped over his shoulder. Tubbo giggled, wrapping it closer around himself. It was more blanket than coat but he loved stealing it anyways.

“Now I’m cold, you little shit.” Schlatt said. But his hand combed through Tubbo’s hair, rubbing around the base of one of his nubby horns, telling him that Dad wasn’t really mad.

“Stop arguing with the kid or we’re gonna be late.” Quackity called back. Tubbo felt his Dad’s arms wrap around him, lifting him up.

“You’re embarrassing me.” Tubbo said. But he didn’t struggle, leaning into his Dad’s hold. “I don’t know why Fundy couldn’t come to this.”

He liked Quackity. The winged Fae was funny and usually had candy hidden away in exchange for playing card games. But he also liked Fundy and the way the fox would let him snuggle into their warm fur. He wanted both of them but only one came.

“He’s handling the Court right now.” Schlatt said. He head butted Tubbo softly, Tubbo giggling at the affectionate gesture. “Maybe you can play with Philza’s youngest.”

“Maybe.” Tubbo said, curling up. Hopefully, they’d be nice.

The Winter Court was pretty but not as pretty as their home. And it took forever to get to wherever they were going, long enough that Tubbo had started to squirm again.

“Philza.” Schlatt said as they stepped into a new room. Tubbo buried himself in the jacket, feeling a bit shy.

“Long time no see, mate.” He heard someone say. “Is that the little Changeling I’ve heard so much about? I thought you’d leave them home.”

“Thought about it but didn’t like the idea of leaving him alone.” Tubbo rolled his eyes. His Dad was so overprotective.

If he wasn’t in his Dad’s arms or by his side, then he was tucked under Quackity’s wings, snuggled up to Fundy, or running around with Connor.

“I empathize, took me six centuries before I left Techno alone for the first time. And Wilbur took even longer. Tommy’s got a long time before he’ll leave the nest.” Tubbo giggled at hearing someone’s muffled complaints. “Is he going to hide for this?”

“I’m not sure.” Schlatt said. He felt his Dad comb through his hair. “You’re going to let them see you, sweetheart?”

Tubbo slowly shook the jacket away, peeking out. It looked kind of like Dad’s meeting room, he decided. But with three strangers.

“Aw, look at him.” The Winter King cooed. Tubbo flushed. “You picked a cute kid.”

“You little minx.” The second prince said. There was something familiar about him but he couldn’t quite think of why. Tubbo tilted his head to the side, confused.

“Have we met?” He asked. Dad’s arms tightened around him.

“You look like someone I’ve met before.” The second prince said smoothly. It wasn’t quite an answer. “Why don’t you go and play with Tommy while we get this boring meeting finished.”

Tubbo knew a distraction when he heard it but he tugged on Dad’s sleeve anyways. “No fighting.” His Dad warned him. “Don’t go too far. If you get in trouble, call for me.”

“Of course.” Tubbo said. He was sure everything would be fine.

And when he met Tommy, who’s golden curls and mischievous grin felt like coming home, he knew it would be perfect.

Baby Tubbo has all the intelligence and none of the wisdom of his older self.

Unofficial Ending: Out of Time

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning: Gruesome imagery, mentions of blood, descriptions of death. This one made me update the tags

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“No. All you have to do is lose and restart the loop. You’re a smart kid, you know who the killers are. Get them voted out or get yourself killed, either way, it’ll be done. You’ve played this game well. If you restart, you could save them. Give them a happy ending before you go.” Karl said. He sat up, paging through his book.

Tubbo inhaled sharply. The idea of it was alluring. Now that he knew roles could change, he could save them. Just a few loops and he was certain one plan would end in success. Catboy and Cornelius would live happily ever after, the killers gone. No need to grieve.

It wouldn’t erase the grief in his heart but it would be a start.

“Why are you telling me this?” He asked warily. It was awfully kind of Karl to do so. Far too kind.

“I told you, I like watching these events. You’ve made my book more interesting than it has been in years. I don’t know if you’ll win this loop but I think you’ll get close. Even getting close deserves a bit of a reward, don’t ya think?” Karl said. He stopped paging through the book. Tubbo could see the dart of his eyes as they skimmed the page. “I thought you said Fey are selfish. Why is it so honking weird that I don’t want my entertainment to leave?”

Tubbo closed his eyes for a moment, thinking about it. Looking over the last few days, he was pretty certain that he could do it. He knew how the game worked now. As long as neither was the killer, it would be easy.

But-

A hand rested on his head, making Tubbo stiffen. “I know how hard it can be, being a mortal in the world of Fey.” Karl said softly. “If you don’t want to do this, that’s fine. I just wanted to give you the option.”

“I’ll think about it.” Tubbo said evasively. But it really did sound nice. All he’d have to do is give up a few loops. They wouldn’t affect him at all because he would return to the same moment anyways. Just a few loops and he could get a happy ending.

“Maybe you should sleep on it.” Karl said, nudging his shoulder. Tubbo hmm’d, trying to think it over. He wanted to make sure he had considered every avenue and sleeping on meant

he wasn't thinking about it. "You've broken the rules anyways. I do need to punish you or I'll lose my street cred."

"Wait-" Tubbo said, turning towards Karl.

The last thing he saw was a gentle smile. A soft touch on his shoulder. And then it all faded to black.

The next morning, he really wanted to go straight. To win the game, to go back to his quest, to save Tommy.

But as he stared into the eyes of those who knew to be killers, he couldn't help himself. Catboy had been killed to protect them. Did they deserve to be protected, to win, at the cost of Catboy's life?

It was so easy too. So easy. A few offhand conversations, a few tears, some rumors liberally spread. He had thought it would be harder but everyone was at such a fever state that they were desperate for any information especially if it didn't implicate themselves. The killers were voted out within a day of each other and Tubbo had watched with stony eyes and a grim smile. When the loop resets, he'll be ready for it and this time, he'll play to win.

He dies on the first night of the next loop. It wasn't even targeted. He had still been working to identify the new killers and arguments to get them voted out. Helga slit his throat before walking out the door, leaving him to drown in his own blood, alone.

A few seconds after she leaves, the door opens again. Tubbo looked up with bleary eyes, choking. It hurt. It hurt so bad he could barely think.

"Oh, kiddo." Cold hands lift him up, resting his head in their lap. They trace the edges of the gruesome wound, heedless of the blood and his gurgled whimpers. "This is terrible."

Stay. Tubbo tried to say but all that comes out is a gurgling moan. Dying alone was his worst nightmare. He knew, logically, this would not be the end. That he'd wake up at the start of the loop, fully healed, ready to play the story out again.

But over that was a voice that screamed for comfort. That wanted someone to hold him, to witness.

"I'll stay." Karl said as if he could hear what Tubbo was thinking. Maybe he could. He wasn't sure, everything felt fuzzy and cold. "You won't have to be alone."

And the Fae stayed until Tubbo had breathed his last breath, stroking his hair and humming. No words of comfort because they both knew they would be lies. But he stayed.

The next loop, he woke up crying so hard that he was shaking. He had pressed his hands to his throat, expecting to feel blood spilling out. To feel his life slipping away. He didn't go to the meeting, didn't want to have to look at the person who killed him.

They hang Cornelius again.

He nearly succumbs to hurt, nearly spreads a rumor that would get Helga out. She isn't the killer this loop but he still can't shake the memory of her nearly killing him and walking away.

Just a few more loops. He could handle it. Last time was just a fluke. This loop was nothing but the result of some bad decisions.

He can still feel the blood pouring down.

It's Cornelius and the mayor again next loop. Tubbo knew as soon as he entered the village center. There's something about the killers that rings false now. Their eyes are somehow dimmer, less lively. It's not something he can describe in words but somehow, he knows it.

He does his best, he really does. Heads off the rumors, creates new ones. A touch optimistic hoping that maybe he could pull it off and the two wouldn't instantly murder everyone after he left.

It doesn't matter. The mayor kills him when they're down to five people left. He bolted away from Cornelius only to run straight into him.

Karl holds him again while he dies.

He tries the doctor tactic again. This time, he plays it well. Sets up elaborate excuses and uses his power to protect Catboy and Cornelius. And for the first two days, it went fantastic. Everyone believes him when he says they're innocent. The first killer is voted out.

And then Catboy turns up dead.

He hyperventilates through most of the meeting. But no one listens to him when he points out Bob trying to blame everyone. Cornelius dies the next night.

This time, when he dies, he's not surprised to find Karl there again. It's nice. They don't mock him for failing, they're just there. Humming or reading their book, his head in their lap and a cold hand tracing over his latest wound.

He tries to declare himself the investigator. Bob challenged him admittedly. Confused, he fumbled. Only he seems to see the coldness in Bob's eyes.

Cornelius is voted out first on bogus evidence. Tubbo dies soon after. Sometimes it feels like the only time he is at peace is when he's dying in Karl's arms. He debates if he should quit the game but he's come so far. Every failure is new information, new plans.

Eventually he has to get it right.

Right?

Investigator. Died on the second night after he revealed it early to save Catboy.

Cornelius kills him before he can run.

He's not sure he wants to save the other anymore. Only the thought of Catboy's tears when the other dies pushes him on.

He goads the killers into killing him before they can hang him.

Killed.

Killed.

Killed.

Killedkillldkilledkilledkilledkilledkilledkilledkilledkilledkilledkilledkilledkilled-

He's so tired.

Why is he playing this game anymore?

Karl asks him if he wants to stop. He says no. The Fae shakes his head and goes back to reading.

He wanted to say yes.

He doesn't know how many loops it's been. But this time, he thinks he's found the perfect combination.

"Thanks so much for staying with me." Tubbo said, pushing the door open. He holds it open so Catboy can enter, beaming at him. It had taken a lot of wheedling for the other to come stay with him but it was the linchpin to his plan. Now, he could keep an eye on the other and cover for them if they were accused!

"It's no problem at all." Catboy said, fiddling with his cane. "Are you sure you need me to? I'd hate to be an inconvenience."

“It’s completely fine.” Tubbo assures him. “I just don’t want to be alone. It’s so scary out there right now, having some company will make me feel a lot better.”

Not that he’d be alone anyways. He thinks of cold hands, whispered stories. He didn’t know why Karl had started to tell him stories but it was nice. Too bad he’d never find out the ending to the latest one, a twisted Masquerade gone wrong.

“If you’re certain.” Catboy said, looking down at the floor. Tubbo hummed, checking the window. Just a few more sun rays annnndddd- night time!

He grinned. He had this one in the bag! Everything had been planned out to exhaustive detail. The conversations today alone had taken almost five loops of planning. He turns, mouth opening to assure Catboy of his safety.

There’s no pain when the knife slips in between his ribs. Not at first. Tubbo stares at Catboy, the words frozen in his mouth. Half of him hopes the other will say something, an apology, an acknowledgement, anything.

The knife slips out, spilling crimson red. Catboy turns and leaves without a word. The door clicks closed.

He sobs when he falls, throwing himself into the cold arms he knows are waiting for him. Out of all the loops, Catboy had never killed him. Had never once been the killer. And now, after what felt like years of planning and pain and death all for the sake of the other, he was killed with nary a word.

It feels like someone is ripping out his heart. Or maybe that’s just the stab wound.

“Oh, darling.” Karl whispers into his hair. “That was a pretty honking bad one.”

“I can’t do this anymore.” Tubbo sobbed. He couldn’t keep killing himself for people who didn’t care, people who didn’t return the love he tried to show them. He didn’t want the pain anymore. “I can’t- please-”

“It’s okay, you’re a brave kid.” Karl whispered. “You just have to get voted out in the next loop. Then you win and you won’t have to do this anymore.”

Tubbo sniffled, shaking his head. “I can’t do this anymore. I can’t keep dying like this. It hurts, it hurts so bad.” He couldn’t really remember why he started in the first place, his brain muddled with years of now useless memories. “Please, I-”

He fumbled at his jacket, pulling out a miraculously unstained letter. He pressed it into Karl’s hands. “Make it stop.” He begs. “I don’t want to hurt anymore.”

Karl smiles, tracing a bloody finger down his face. He sets the letter to the side, scooping him up and burying his face into his curls. It doesn’t hurt. All the pain seeps away in a moment, leaving Tubbo cold and limp in his arms. “Of course, kiddo. I’ll make sure you never feel hurt like this again. You just need to sleep for a bit, okay?”

“And I’ll wake up, right?” Tubbo asked. “I gave you the letter, you have to make sure I’ll be okay.”

“I’ll be with you every step of the way.” Karl said. He’s never lied to him before. Tubbo lays his head down, feeling the darkness sweep him away again. Only this time, it pulls him deeper under instead of back out in the scorching sun.

As he slips away, Karl whispers to him, “They’re going to love you. I already do.”

Chapter End Notes

Time heals all wounds, even the ones it has caused.

Alternate Ending: The Newest Bloom in the Garden

Chapter Notes

Tigger warning: unwanted body modification, minor gore

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Dawn breaks over the sky and it is a horrible sight.

It shouldn't be so beautiful, Tubbo thought sullenly. Purples, and pinks, and golds clash in the sky above him, streaking across clouds and spilling open to paint the sky. It shouldn't be so beautiful because he just lost. The whole world should be in mourning with him.

Niki beams. "You can put him down now. Techno." She said. "Leave us. I have a bargain to collect."

"See you in book club." Technoblade huffed. Tubbo yelped as he was dropped to the ground, blinking up above him. Technoblade stares down at him for a moment before turning away without a single word. As if he wasn't even worth last words, the Hunt coming to an end just like that. With a smirk and the swish of the red cloak.

Because it has come to an end, Tubbo thought. No matter how much he strained his muscles, they didn't move, locked in place through the bargain magic. He had lost and now it was time to pay up. No escaping now. Niki settled down behind him, one hand tracing over the flowers in his hair.

"Your Name, please." She whispered. Adding a please as if he was doing it by himself, as if he hadn't lost and forfeited it.

The word spilled out from his lips, drawn forth with magic even as he struggled to swallow them back down. "Tobias Underscore." He said, the words forcing their way out. He tried to push himself up, weak and dizzy from the sudden drop and the magic but Niki was quicker.

"Tobias Underscore, calm down." She said. Instantly, he dropped back to the ground, muscles going lax and a soft haze spreading across his mind. He should be panicking right now, he noted, but everything felt dull, detached. A thick blanket separating him from his emotions.

"There we go." She cooed. She settled down next to him, a hand combing through his hair. "That's the cute little child I saw in you. All calm and obedient."

He wanted to spit, to struggle, but he couldn't. There was the soft shuffle of feet over grass and Tubbo couldn't even find himself to be panicked about the intrusion. He'd be horrified, if he could, but the calm still held sway.

“I thought I asked you to get Eret and Foolish.” Niki said, the hand in his hair stopping for a moment.

“Eret said he needed to talk to someone and Foolish said he’d go with them. They seemed in a rush too, apparently Eret was really worried they’d leave before he could reach them.” He vaguely recognized the voice. Jack. Red and blue glasses appeared above him examining him briefly before pulling away. “Oh, he’s out of it. Hey, can I paint on his face? I’ve got some good swear words that’d look great on him.”

“Don’t tease him! He’s just a kid. I know you’re mad about your traps being foiled but I’m sure he’s sorry about that.” He wasn’t. Tubbo clamped his mouth shut and Niki sighed. “Tobias Underscore, apologize.”

“I’m sorry.” He said, the words tugged out with invisible strings. But he wasn’t, he swore in his mind. He wasn’t sorry.

Jack laughed. “Ey, we won in the end, didn’t we?” There was a sharp sound. Did Fey high five? Because it sounded like one. “And I didn’t even have to do much work so I guessed it worked out!”

“Lazy.” Niki said, but the words were full of affection. “Go get Puffy if you’re so full of energy then. She’ll want to see this. I’ll let her have final decision on this.”

“Someone’s looking to get brownie points.” Jack teased. Niki swatted his arm and he laughed. There was the soft shuffle of grass and Tubbo fought to raise his head.

The hand returned to his hair. “Oh no, that won’t do, dear. I like you better like this. You have such terrible eyebags, you really need a nap don’t you?” When he continued to move, she sighed. “Tobias Underscore, relax. Don’t speak.”

The dreadful feeling of his muscles relaxing against his will returned but this time, it stayed, leaving him loose and boneless on the ground. He couldn’t even muster up the strength to speak. Niki hummed. “Better. We’ll have to work on that, if Puffy decides you can stay. You’ll be a cute Changeling, won’t you? All sweet and cheery, sleeping in the meadow or nestled among the mossy hollows. We’ll have to get you your own throne but you already have your own crown. It’s like you were made for us.”

He wasn’t made for anyone, he wanted to scream. The crown had come from her trying to kill him. How could she twist this, turn it into a good thing?

“I think I can see why Dream and Schlatt like you now.” Niki continued. Tubbo hated it, hated how he couldn’t even panic. The way his chest rose and fell evenly as she talked. “There’s so much sweetness buried under that prickly exterior. Like a rose’s thorns. You won’t need your thorns, not here. I just want to wrap you up and coddle you. Puffy will love it.”

“What will I love?” A new voice broke in. That was the worst bit, Tubbo reflected. The point where he knew he should panic, where it would begin to build, and then the thick blanket would smother it away. Left to sputter uselessly without resolution.

“Look what I found.” Niki said. Found. As if he was a toy, lying around in the grass and waiting for a new owner. “You’ll love him.”

“He does look rather sweet. I like the flowers.” The lady, Puffy, settled down next him, leaning over. She was dressed as a pirate, the hat fighting to stay on her fluffy white hair. Horns crowned her head, so similar to Schlatt that Tubbo briefly wondered if they were related. She grinned, booping his nose. “Aw, is this the surprise you were talking about?”

“He’s the one the other Courts made a big fuss over.” Niki said agreeably. Tubbo tried to glare at them but couldn’t quite manage it judging by the way Puffy snorted. “Poor little child tired himself out running around so I used his Name to get him to relax.”

“He looks like he needs it. Lots of stress for someone so young.” Puffy agreed, trying a hand down his cheek. Tubbo wished he could bite it. He really wanted to bite one of them right now. “Do you want to keep him, my love?”

“That’s what I wanted to ask you.” Niki said, sickeningly fond for someone who was talking about keeping him like a toy. “I know you were sad after Foolish grew up and started going out on their own. And then Dream no longer having the time to visit. But of course, I didn’t want to adopt someone without asking for your permission.”

“A new child, huh?” Puffy said with a hum. Tubbo stared at her as she grabbed his face, tilting his head back and forth. “He looks like he could use a good parent.”

“It wouldn’t have to be us, you don’t to agree for me.” Niki said, moving so that she could lean against Puffy, They almost looked like a painting, two lovers sitting in a flowery clearing. He guessed the story about a pirate marrying a Fae queen was true after all.

But he’d never get to tell Tommy that they were right and he was wrong. That the story he doubted, that they argued over for hours was real, right now, Tommy was probably in the clutches of the Winter Court, [preparing to be turned. Technoblade could be back already to share the news that his Quest was over if Philza didn’t already know. While he laid here, helpless to stop it.

A hot tear slipped down his cheek and then another. Puffy cooed, gently wiping it away and glancing at Niki. “Don’t be sad.” She whispered. “I’m here right now, you’d don’t have to be sad.”

But his tears didn’t obey, continuing to slip down his cheeks. He was helpless. Trapped here. He had lost, his Name given away and currently being used against him. The only thing left for him was to wait and see if they’d keep him or if he would be traded away to the Summer or Autumn Courts.

“Like I said, we don’t have to keep him. I want to be sure that you’d want him, want a Changeling in our family. He deserves the attention and love of a family who wants him, I think, he’s earned that. Certainly fought enough through the Veil.” Niki said. “But Schlatt or Dream would take him in a heartbeat if you want. They already made sizeable offers.”

His stomach roiled at that and he was punished with Puffy carefully rubbing his cheek, a falsely soothing gesture that felt all too real. “I want to keep him.” Puffy said. “He’s adorable and you’re right, I’ve wanted a child. I think he’ll fit in perfectly. Schlatt and Dream will just have to learn to live with it.”

Niki laughed, pulling Puffy in for a quick kiss before looking back down at Tubbo. “It looks like you’ll be staying here with us.” She said, beaming. Tubbo tried to glare back, unable to speak. “Aw, it’s okay. I’m sure you’ll be happy!”

He wouldn’t have a choice, he thought sullenly. Between the changeling enchantment and the Fey themselves, he was doomed. He managed a rough wheeze as he was scooped off the ground by Puffy. “Hold on.” She said.

Arms wrapped around him, partially picking him up off the ground before there was a soft crackle of magic and Tubbo groaned as his stomach lurched. If he had eaten anything, he was sure he would have thrown up. It felt like someone had forced him through a very narrow tube, his insides getting squeezed until he was sure he was going to pop before the pressure abruptly disappeared.

When his vision cleared, he could see flowers overhead. Arching tree branches, grown so close together that they formed a ceiling with flowers of all colors filling in the spaces. Despite himself, he felt his eyes widen in surprise. It was beautiful.

“Aw, I think he likes the flowers.” Niki said. “I wonder what he’ll be?”

Be? Be what? Tubbo tried to move, to pull away, but he was unable to resist as he was set down into a bed of soft clover. He sneezed as a flower hit his nose, trying to ignore the soft noise that Puffy made.

“Maybe he’ll take after you or me. Or maybe he’ll be something all of his own.” Puffy said, a fond look in her eyes. She pulled away, disappearing out of his limited view. “You should start it soon though before Schlatt or Dream try to steal him away. I know those two and they’re awfully competitive.”

“I know, I’ve gotten into spats with them long before we were married.” Niki said. She smiled down at Tubbo and he desperately wished he could move as her hand moved to rest above his heart. He wasn’t sure what was going to happen next but he had a good feeling that he wasn’t going to enjoy it at all. “Try and breathe, okay? This is going to hurt.”

What the fuck was that supposed-

Tubbo let out a strangled gasp as pain stabbed through his chest, spasming wildly. His hands jerked, moved to pull whatever it was away but before he could touch it, the magic course through his veins and they feel again.

It felt like he was being ripped apart. Roots digging under his skin, crawling along his veins. Thorns tearing through everything in their path. He coughed, tasting old copper in his mouth. He wanted to run, to flee, but couldn’t run.

He whimpered as his eyes *hurt*, like something was digging into them before abruptly everything went black and to his horror, he couldn't blink it away. Couldn't blink at all.

Distantly, he could hear someone cooing, another whispering words he couldn't hear. Desperately, he clung to them, trying to stay awake. The sickly smell of flowers was everywhere now, overpowering and rotten on his tongue.

There was another spike of pain, this time from his back and Tubbo wheezed as gentle hands flipped him over. Pain like fire, like the rip of a thorn through skin, seemed to trail their every move. Unbearable itching spread into the wake of it, so bad that he would claw himself bloody if it wasn't for the magic.

He couldn't do this. Could barely breath through the pain. They were killing him, they had to be. This was a trap-

"It's okay. Just a little longer. You're doing incredible sweetheart." Tubbo wheezed. If this was how- if this was how great felt, he thinks they're lying to him.

Blearily, he heard a sound like ripping paper, warmth spreading over his back. A soft hum of words. "Oh, he'll be our little bee. Adorable."

That was the last straw. The pain dragged his mind down, into the depths of sleep.

He just wanted to save his friend.

At least he liked bees.

Chapter End Notes

and far away an apology is given from a once ruler to a once forgotten fox, long festering hurt slowly beginning to heal

Unofficial Ending: Out in the Snow

Chapter Notes

Merry Christmas!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tubbo pulled his snow goggles down, squinting through the dense snowfall in front of them. “Head straight!” He yelled, trying to raise his voice over the wind. “Don’t get turned around!”

He heard Tommy yelling something back, his friend’s words ripped away by the wind.

And then the grip vanished on his sleeve.

Tubbo screamed, reaching out blindly into the blizzard. His head closed around something warm and he pulled back, letting out a quiet grunt as he was knocked onto his back.

“Gerroff.” He wheezed. No answer. Tommy had gone completely limp, early cold shock maybe? He sneezed, brushing Tommy’s golden hair out of his face and looked up.

For a moment, the wires didn’t connect and he wondered why a traveler was out in the storm. Especially one lacking any snow gear. He opened his mouth, ready to ask them if they needed help.

And then his eyes landed on the large black wings.

“Tubbo.” Tommy whispered. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Tommy’s skin beginning to pale, his breathing becoming more and more wheezy under the wail of the storm. Tubbo let out a sound that could be best described as a cross between a whimper and a whine. “Run.”

No. Not without Tommy.

Tubbo scrambled into a sitting position, holding Tommy to his chest.

Why? Why them? Why now? They hadn’t done anything wrong except take this path. They wore red, had done no disrespect, so *why*?

Tubbo wheezed as Philza kicked him in the side, knocking him back on his back. He lied there for a moment, wheezing for air. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Philza reach for Tommy.

His mouth set in grim determination, the pain numbed by the cold. He wouldn't let him touch Tommy.

He forced himself up, covering Tommy like a shield. "If you want to kill or freeze him, you'll have to go through me first." Tubbo swore. The words felt hollow, it was clear that something had already happened to Tommy. "I'll kill you. I will."

Philza was silent, watching him. Tubbo glanced down at Tommy. "Can you run?" He whispered.

"No." Tommy said. He shifted slightly. "Grabbed my arm. My legs feel like blocks of ice. It hurts."

"There's nothing you can do."

Tubbo jerked, looking up to glare at Philza. For a moment, the Fae watched him before smiling. It was cold, absolutely terrifying. "You're freezing. Better you go and take shelter, mate. Your friend will be fine. Better than fine."

"No." Tubbo snapped, curling around Tommy. Philza would have to kill him first. "Not without Tommy."

Philza's smile wavered and Tubbo yelped as a cold hand wrapped around his shoulder, picking him up and tossing him to the side like so much trash. He wheezed as he struck the ground, his back screaming as he shoved himself back to his feet.

For a moment, his brain fuzzed, pain and cold taking over. He wanted to go home. He didn't want to be here, facing a blizzard and a Fae.

And then Tommy screamed and the world snapped back to cold reality.

Tubbo darted to the side, uncaring of whether he got lost. Two figures came into view. Philza kneeling on the ground, one hand pinning Tommy who was thrashing around, screaming in pain.

Tommy's eyes locked on him. "Tubbo!" He screamed. And then he slumped back like a doll with its strings cut.

He couldn't see him breathing ohgodohsgodsohfuck-

An answering scream burst out of his chest, angry and grieving. He slammed into Philza like a battering ram, throwing the Fae off Tommy.

Too late did Tubbo realize that left him to face a very unwounded Fae. He grunted as he was thrown to the side, crashing into the snow. Tubbo wheezed, trying to push himself up and out of the cold.

A boot landed on his chest, pushing him back down. "Why do you even try?" Philza asked. Tubbo flared up at him. "There's nothing you can do. You should have run along when I told you to."

“Never.” Tubbo swore. He’d promised to be there for Tommy, forever and ever. If he went into the afterlife today, he’d go knowing he did everything he could.

He clawed at the foot pressing him down, missing the dark and distant look in Philza’s eyes. “You know, talking like that, you kind of remind me of-“ Philza shook the memory away, a sudden soft smile on his lips. “I was just going to take Tommy, but I suppose two changelings in the hand is worth a try.”

“What?” Tubbo said, confusion distracting him from trying to escape. What did that mean?

Philza smiled at him, but there was something more feral about it. “This will go better if you hold still.” He said, his voice as cold as the snow.

And then he crouched down, Tubbo redoubled his efforts, trying to push him off. Some primal part of him told him that if Philza succeeded, that would be the end of him.

Philza tutted, a quiet sound almost stolen away by the blizzard. With one hand, he grabbed both of Tubbo’s wrists, easily pinning them.

And with the other, he pressed down on Tubbo’s chest, infusing a wave of freezing cold that took Tubbo’s breath away.

This wasn’t cold, it was *cold*. The kind of cold that almost felt warm, forcing the nerves to give into their frozen fate. The kind that promised death.

Tubbo let out a strangled scream, trying to curl in on himself. To warm himself with what little scraps of body heat he had left. His snow gear felt about as useful as a cardboard shield against a charging bull.

Was this what Tommy had experienced? Out of the corner of his eye, he could see red in the snow.

“Tommy.” He wheezed, not quite sure if he was asking if he was okay or begging for him to be okay. Dark spots were growing in his eyes and it was getting harder to cling to conscious.

Dimly, he could feel the pressure on his wrists release but they felt numb with cold. A cold hand combed through his curls, shushing him when he whined.

“You’re stronger than you look.” Someone said. Tubbo felt like he should know that voice, hate the owner, but the cold had sapped away his will. He moaned quietly, wanting the person to help him. “It’s okay mate, the worst is already over.”

“Another one? Phil, I looked away for two minutes.” Tubbo blinked up at the blurry figure standing above them. He couldn’t make out any detail, only vibrant pink and light blue.

And red in their arms. Tubbo focused on that, recognizing the figure. “Tommy.” He whispered, the words getting torn away by the wind.

“Save your breath mate, he can’t hear you right now.” Tubbo growled at him. “Aw, look. He’s angry. Adorable.”

He was-

He was going to steal this person's kneecaps.

"Pick him up and get ready to go. I don't like them being out here. Too many things a stupid mortal will try and do." The other figure said. "They need to be safe."

"Who's the parent here?" Tubbo wheezed as cold arms curled around him. His body felt like ice, but the arms around him made his skin feel burned like he was touching fresh ice. "We're heading home, mate, it'll be okay."

No. Home was a cabin in the woods with a warm fire crackling in the fireplace. Home was Tommy. Home wasn't-

Wasn't-

Wasn't what?

He didn't know. Dimly, he knew he should be terrified. But really, he just felt tired. He wanted to sleep.

And so he did.

Chapter End Notes

Just a little bit faster...

Unofficial Ending: Cold Hearted

Chapter Notes

Happy new year, time to deliver the angst chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Why are you so determined about this anyway?” Wilbur said, staring at the ceiling. “I mean, wow, charming you got this far. Really didn’t expect that. But why keep going? Why do you have to be so selfish?”

Tubbo’s head jerked up, his eyes narrowing. It had not been an uncommon question during his quest, or even among the Winter Fey, Technoblade had questioned his goal as well. But now, standing here at the moment of his failure or victory, it only stoked his rage. “I’m the selfish one?”

“Of course.” Wilbur said, waving a hand. “Tommy is so so bright. It’s like he carries the sun in him. He’s such a charmer, cuddly, cute, he’s practically the perfect little brother for me. And then you come along, all meh meh meh, you can’t have him. As if you’re not taking away a life many would beg for.”

“How dare you!” Tubbo said, more yelled. Technoblade’s hand dropped to his side, resting on the hilt of his sword. “I’m selfish? I’m the selfish one? You’re the one who ripped him away from his home! Who claims he’ll be happy when you don’t even know him! All the stuff you say makes him perfect is bullshit! Those are all things you used to describe a pet, not a brother! But I guess it makes sense considering you don’t even know him!”

His hand dropped to his wrist, wrapping around the snowflake charm. The cold was hard to touch, but he endured it, feeling the rage in his chest burn even hotter. How dare Wilbur say that to him, how dare he say it in front of Tommy. Tubbo was going to use this charm to rip the snow out of Tommy’s heart and then protect him from ever falling to the Fey again.

“Of course I know him.” Wilbur said, the temperature in the room beginning to drop. “I know everything about him! I’ve seen him laugh, I’ve seen him cry, and I was there! I know more about him than you could possibly comprehend!”

Tubbo felt his rage boil over, all words at the tip of his tongue dying away. He didn't care what Wilbur had to say next, what bullshit excuse the other had come up with to justify what they had done. Wilbur didn't know Tommy.

His hand tightened around the charm. And without a second thought, with a moment of reflection or hesitation. Without even a plan. Tubbo pulled on the magic within with every bit of mental strength he had.

The pain made him stagger. It felt like someone was driving freezing cold splinters under his skin, his breath coming out in fog. If the blaze rod had been a hidden snow pit, then this was an avalanche, dragging him under. Burying him under the weight of it all. For a moment, all of his mind was consumed by the sheer cold, the amount of magic that rushed in at his call.

It could kill him, he thought, a bit delirious. Could still kill him. It felt like he was balancing on a knife's edge with even one tiny snowflake enough to push him over. This kind of power was too much for a mortal to hold.

He forced himself to take a deep breath, lungs wheezing under the pressure of it all. He could hear Tommy whispering to him, in, out, you got this, take those fucking breaths. Another. Tubbo dragged his eyes up to meet Philza and for once, the other wasn't smug. All he could see was confusion and curiosity. An opportunity to move while they were still distracted.

Crossing the floor to Tommy felt like trying to push over a tree. Dimly, he could see ice spreading around where he stepped, nearly consuming his own legs. But just a bit longer. He forced himself to take slow, dragging steps, stubbornly gritting his teeth through the pain. He needed to do this. His last cards on the table, all for this.

Tubbo clung to life with tooth and nail. He wasn't going to leave Tommy behind, no matter how much the power of winter threatened to drag him under. If he went into that goodnight, it would be after seeing Tommy was safe. No sooner.

His legs gave out when he reached the altar, making him slump down next to it. Almost a mirror image of what he had seen Tommy do before. With all of his strength, Tubbo forced himself to reach up and take Tommy's hand. It was freezing cold to the touch, or maybe that was just him. Limp, it didn't respond as he intertwined their fingers, a cruel parody of how they used to hold hands.

Involuntarily, his eyes fell shut. If the winter royals had tried to speak, had tried to kill him, he couldn't see. Couldn't hear. Every bit of his focus was on Tommy.

He could feel it now. The cold magic coursed through Tommy's veins, resonating with the stolen magic in his own. It was so bright in his mind that he could almost see it, the spiderweb tracery under Tommy's skin. Stealing away every last bit of warmth and suffocating it under the sheer cold of winter.

No more. Tubbo thought stubbornly. No more. He reached out, tugging at the magic in Tommy's vein. It felt like trying to catch water, the magic slipping out between his mental grasp. As he dragged his mind through, the trceries distorted, shifted, but slowly began to recollect where they were.

Determined, Tubbo forced his mind back again, trying to tug it away. Imitating what he had done before, he tried to pull the magic to himself, filling the yawning abyss in his chest. Some came and Tubbo nearly crumpled under the pressure of it, barely recollecting himself as he tried to force more away.

It wasn't working. With every tug he made, every bit of magic he pulled away, more took its place. It was like trying to shovel a sidewalk in a blizzard. Tubbo forced himself back under,

this time focusing in on the cold blue glow in Tommy's heart.

He had never seen it before, could not ever admit to hearing about it in a story. But he knew exactly what it was. The shard of winter. It sat in Tommy's heart like a second beat, with every soft pulse of Tommy's heart, it sent out more cold magic. Every bit could be traced back here.

Distantly, he could feel his own heart start to slow, matching Tommy's beat. Just a bit more, Tubbo thought, he just had to get rid of this. He forced himself to reach forward and *tug*.

His mind exploded.

Memories, thoughts, the swirling muzziness of dreams. Soft lovem bright frustration, delight, sorrow, everything rushed into his own. Tubbo reeled under the weight of it, under the weight of Tommy. The shard felt super chilled under his mental touch, threads beginning to expand along his grip. Like a spider that had found new prey.

Tubbo tried to fight through it, back to his mission but it just kept coming. Memories of their home, of cows, the soft coziness of sleeping in a safe and warm bed. Even a few edged with cold, the desperation to open the windowsill, the need to run up the mountain.

All the anger in his chest had been extinguished under the cold weight of the magic. Even as he tugs, he could feel how deeply rooted the magic was. Spring magic, Autumn magic, Summer magic, even winter magic, none could have removed this from Tommy. He couldn't stop the winter from coming.

Who was he? He wasn't sure anymore if he was Tommy or Tubbo, thoughts and memories beginning to shift and overlap. Every time he managed to formulate a clear sense of who he was, it would be buried under a new wave.

"Alright, I think that's about enough of this. Goodness, you two have certainly managed to get yourselves entangled."

Another. He could feel the soft glide of foreign magic carefully sifting through the threads, pulling away the threads connecting him to Tommy. Tubbo ~~Tommy~~ Tubbo tried to pull away, some sense of danger blaring. The magic mentally shushed him, brushing away his weak strikes.

With every thread pulled away, he could feel himself coming together again. Memories slowly began to sift out, no longer two point of views of the same situation and the too full feeling beginning to fade. But he couldn't seem to move. Tubbo could feel the moment the foreign magic turned it's eyes upon his hold on the shard. He struggled, desperately batting at their intrusion.

He had to get this out. He couldn't quite gather his thoughts to articulate why but he was trying to get this out. Needed to remove it. It couldn't stay with Tommy.

"You're hurting him. And yourself. You're not going to pull it out and the more you try, the more likely it is that you'll come away with damage I can't fix."

Damage? The thought made Tubbo hesitate, his strikes slowing. He didn't want to hurt Tommy. He loved Tommy, bubbles of happy, soft, and warm thoughts coming to mind. The cold feeling made a twist that almost felt like a mental laugh. And then struck.

Before he could fight back, come back to himself, it carefully tore away his grip. Tubbo cried out, fighting against them, the waves of pain coming from, being torn away. But it ignored his struggles, his cries, slowly ripping away each and every connection.

Tubbo tumbled back to himself in a flurry of cold magic and icy tears. Being himself felt strange again, his body too heavy, too full with magic. The abyss in his chest is no longer empty but so so full, enough to be painful. It came with the awareness that someone was touching him and Tubbo lashed out, magic rising up to his call.

"Heh? Did you really just try to ice me?" A monotone voice said, barely trickling through his hazy thoughts. Tubbo lashed out again, trying to get them to go away. He needed to go back, needed to help Tommy. They were distracting him.

"Stop trying to ice Techno." Tubbo whined as someone touched his head, trying to pull away. His eyes were shut. Why were they still shut? Had they frozen that way? The hand dropped lower, pressing against his chest and Tubbo stiffened, feeling the foreign magic gaze turn upon him. It felt like he was in the gaze of a huge predator. "Hm."

"What does that hm mean?" A different voice said, more lilting and song like. Tubbo tried to lash out at them as well but the foreign magic blocked them as well. "Just block it off already."

Block what off? Before Tubbo could react, the foreign magic lunged for the winter inside of him. The charm, he thought dimly. They were trying to take it away. He bucked, trying to pull away from their grasp but couldn't stop them from forcing open his hand, the sharp tinkle of metal shattering.

Tubbo let out a gasp, slumping back. Every bit of strength felt like it had drained away, the winter gone but leaving behind an all consuming chill.

"There. All done. Now I'm taking Tommy to his room and we can drop him off at the Autumn Court." The singing voice said crossly. Take Tommy? Tubbo wanted to protest, but his voice refused to answer his call. All he could think about was how empty he felt without the winter raging in his chest. The soft frost wasn't enough, he couldn't survive on it. He needed the winter back.

So, as the foreign magic pulled away, he reached out for them and tugged. They were so greedy. He could feel how much power they had, couldn't they share just a little bit with him? Instead of leaving him cold and alone?

"Oh." The person whispered. Tubbo tugged again, more stubborn. Just a bit. He just needed a bit. The foreign magic twisted and Tubbo nearly melted in relief as his pull was answered with cold magic, trickling into the empty space. Not enough, not the blizzard, but it was there.

“Phil, what is that oh. What are you doing, old man.” The monotone voice said. “Phil. Phil, no. Phil, stop adopting the orphan.”

“It seems like you’ll be having another little brother.” They said. Tubbo had to force himself to focus on their words, too distracted by the chill of their magic. He felt himself shift, someone combing through his hair. It felt nice. “The poor little one got himself so tangled up with the winter magic and Tommy. He’s practically begging for anyone to fill the void left behind from me breaking it, halfway to Winter Fae already on his own. Adorable.”

They cooed as he whined, trying to tug for a bit more magic “No, no. Not too much. You’ll hurt yourself trying to take too much at one time. Just this much will be good enough for you.”

“He’ll be a lot less friendly when he wakes.” Singing voice said. But he could feel someone new touch his cheek.

“There are ways to deal with that.” They dismissed. Tubbo felt himself shift, cold hand settling back on his chest. “All he needs is a winter shard and he’ll be ours.”

What did that mean? Tubbo tried to whine but he was softly hushed. Part of him felt like he should be more worried but it was so comfortable, tucking into their hold. “As if you’ll give up on him. You’re already brooding, don’t think I don’t notice you giving him a bit of magic.” Monotone voice said.

“Birdza feeling the empty nest?” Singing voice teased. “I’ll allow it. I think having two little brothers could be nice. I’ve always been a bit greedy. And I could hold this over Schlatt for centuries.”

“You should show some more respect.” They muttered. Tubbo made a soft sound as the magic pulled away, already feeling the void returning. How could they abandon him? “Hush now. You’ve proven yourself to be strong enough for this but that does not mean it won’t hurt. You’ll come find us when you’re ready.”

“Dadza noooo. Stop leaving all my little brothers out in the world alone. You’re sooo mean, I just want to talk to them about interior decorating.”

A chuckle. Tubbo scrunched up his face, the gears beginning to spin. What was going on? “It’s the only way. A little bit of alone time and his instincts will fully take over. Less of a chance of him trying to run. He’ll come back. He’ll need to.”

Tubbo whines, starting to struggle. He wasn’t sure if he liked the sound of this. The voice shushes him, effortlessly pinning his arms. “Hush, snow child. And take a deep breath.”

And then his chest burns for the second time that day and Tubbo sinks into the darkness.

When he wakes, he is lying at the foot of the mountain and he is so very cold.

And so very alone.

Chapter End Notes

Don't think of Tubbo trying to fight against the cold, desperately trying to protect himself in the lonely mountain paths. Don't think of him reaching for the charm bracelet and realizing it isn't there as he feels his heart pump cold blood through his veins, a yawning abyss finally satisfied. Don't think of him staggering through the snow, trying to leave the mountain, only to find himself never gaining any distance. Don't think of how he only feels emptiness when he realizes his flower crown has withered and Schlatt's jacket is gone. Don't think of him giving up and turning around, staggering into the delighted arms of those waiting for him.

Don't think of him giving up at the start, never even trying to escape.

Sometimes stories don't get to have a happy ending.

Summer Nights

Chapter Notes

Heeeeey, I'm baaack!

Summer Court from an outsider POV... including the Court's newest Changeling.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Amanda had well and truly fucked up this time.

She had known it was a mistake as soon as she did. Skipped herself down to one of those mushroom circles, desperate and raring to have a little bit of magic in her life. Life in town had been so plain, so dull, so *boring*. Who could begrudge her a spot of adventure?

A nice safe wish she'd make. A pixie or a brownie or some such, a little bit of danger easily settled with a thimbleful of milk and a bit of honey. She'd skip home with a little bit of magic clinging to her, maybe a new skill at sewing or beautifully embroidered shoes, oh, she had been so jealous of Mable's shoes. Her neighbor had been prancing around, showing them off. Just a little wish, something she could tuck close to her heart when the boredom grew too much.

But when the handsome young man showed up instead of the expected pixie, her tongue had deserted her completely. She couldn't see his face behind the mask, a crude affair of porcelain with a smiley face on it. But she could see it in the way he moved like the crackle of lightning, pinned on the earth. There had been something charming to the tilt of his mask, the curious way his hands move.

So that's why mortals will run off with the Fey, she had thought, blushing a bit at the thought. Certainly, in that sun dappled clearing, there had been something romantic about it. A certain warmth to the air, a feeling like she was the only one in the world with the Fey watching her.

He had laughed then, like he knew what she was thinking. A most odd laugh, like the wheeze of a teakettle, and yet, it charmed her. An odd laugh for an odd fellow. That had put her well and truly out of sorts, fumbling for her practiced words. Her first mistake.

Somehow, her carefully rehearsed wishes suddenly seemed impractical. Foolish. Here was real magic standing in front of her, the kind of adventure she had dreamed about. No pixie or brownie wish, the kind where everyone knew what you did and cast unapproving looks but didn't say anything because it was the rude thing to do. But the kind of magic that kicked off stories with wild adventures, lovely romances, and sweeping settings.

And death, she would remember later. Death was always woven into the tales of the Fey. But at the time, the sun had well and truly addled her thoughts. It had been shining brightly then,

she could remember, almost beating down. Everything had been cast in the hazy golden glow that came in those lazy summer evenings.

“What do you wish for?” He said, his voice soft and still a bit wheezy from laughter. The dark eyes of his mask bore into hers but she had felt no fear. She had tilted her head up, tossing her hair back with the same self confidence that had made her walk to the mushroom circle.

“I want an adventure.” She said instead, honesty leaping to her lips. “A real one, the kind that’s in stories. I’m fed up with it all, the boredom and monotony. I want a real adventure.”

It had seemed a bit foolish still and she remembered blushing. But the Fae had just nodded thoughtfully. “Adventure.” He said. “Yes, I can grant you an adventure. You’ll just need to play a little game with me.”

“A game?” She asked, a bit of concern slipping into her voice. Something about those words had stirred her to reason. A game was rather a bit different then milk and honey.

“A child’s game. Me and my friends enjoy playing hide and seek but we’ve gotten rather bored of playing with each other. You just need to stay hidden from us until the sun begins to set and I’ll grant you your wish.” He had said. He shrugged, dipping his head to stare at the ground. The picture of a young man embarrassed by his request.

“Hide and seek.” She murmured, staring up at the sky. There would be a handful of hours until sunset, but no more than two if she was to guess. She had played it before as a young child, tumbling in and out of this very forest. They would dare each other, seeing who would creep the farthest inside before running out again. Often, the winner would be her, always a bit disappointed by the mundane spooks of twitchy squirrels and a tree branch rattling in the wind.

It had seemed so simple and uncomplicated, the golden sunshine making her think of those charming afternoons filled with laughter. Just a little game, and she would have everything she wanted. How hard could it be to hide for a while?

If she could go back in time and strangle herself, she would. A fool, she had never once thought to ask what would happen if she lost.

“Okay.” She had said, feeling a bit swept away in the excitement of it all. For wouldn’t this be an adventure in and of itself, a game of hide and go seek with the Fey? Wouldn’t that be a story to flaunt when she went back home? And oh, tongues would rag, but she could almost see herself recounting it now. “Okay.”

She could only describe it as a shift in the air. The gentle chirp of crickets went silent, even the breeze going quiet. And that gentle, charming young man had stilled, head turning to the side. And suddenly it was not the bashfulness of a young man she was staring at, but a predator waiting to pounce.

And with a sudden, almost animalistic awareness, she knew they weren’t alone and that she had just made a grave mistake.

“Run.”

She had fled into the woods past him like a startled deer, the sound of wheezing laughter trailing her steps. And when she glanced back, ever so briefly as she stepped into the trees, she could still see him standing there, watching her.

Waiting for the countdown to end.

She had stopped trying to hide after what she thought might have been an hour. At first, she had given it a good go, racing back to one of her childhood burrows. A fallen log, rotted out by the element, and just the right size to fit a determined young woman. It had nearly killed her, a black haired man setting it on fire with a snap of his fingers.

A second, hiding under the riverbank, had left her with bright pink legs after a hasty escape when the water began to boil. Wicked work.

No matter where she went, there was always one on her trail. There were more than the young man now. She had counted six, catching flashes through the trees as she ran. There was the young man of course, the black haired one, and the one with the odd white glasses. They were the most normal looking, by a manner of speaking, even with the mask, the flicker of dancing flames along the hands, and the deadly looking bow.

After that was what she had called the horrors. A cat as big as a person that would have snapped her neck as pretty as you pleased after dropping from a tree branch if it had been for an ill timed stumble. She had come away from that with a scraped arm and a resolution to never trust a cat again. A demon, for that's what it had to be, with skin as black as the night and glowing white eyes. A hulking man with dark green hair and four arms, the bottom half of his face hidden by a mask that hissed when he spoke.

For they did speak, and such horrifying things too.

“I can't believe she tried to hide in the river, I thought you said she was good at this Dream.” That wheezing tea kettle laugh she had grown to loathe.

“I never said that! You're twisting my words.” Dream, who she was pretty sure was the masked man, had said. “I said that she may be good. And you haven't caught her yet.”

“Yeah, because this is boring. I can't believe we left him alone for this.” A soft hissing remark and a murmured reply she couldn't hear over the pulsing in her ears. “You can run but you can't hide, lady!”

Brave words had settled on the tip of her tongue, soon quashed by her aching lungs and the rabbit pulse of her heart. They always seemed just a step behind her, predators taunting prey to see how fast it could run. Her father had told her something like this once, she remembered, about hunters who would catch deer by pursuing it till they collapsed from exhaustion. Or fear. She had never been quite sure of which.

Now, fleeing blindly through the forest, she didn't know whether it would be the fear or the exhaustion that would get her. Her steps were beginning to drag, every breath feeling like she

was dragging sandpaper down her throat. Everywhere she turned seemed to be densely woven branches and tree trunks pressed tightly together, herding her forward. A trap she knew, but one she had to follow because where else could she go? The voices and footsteps had dropped away, but for how long?

That was when she saw it. A little break in the massive trees, a glint of brighter sunlight. She had turned, rushing towards it. A clearing could mean hiding spots, a fallen log perhaps, or a cave she could catch her breath in. She rushed to it, pushing her way through the trees into a rather breath taking clearing.

At first glance, it was rather like one of the clearings she had known at home. A bit of grass, hemmed in by thick gnarled trees. A few flowers shyly lingering among the greenery. But on the second glance, it grew odder and odder.

The branches of the trees above had been pushed out of the way. And she meant pushed. She could see the lumps on the bark as if someone had grabbed the branches and simply yanked them to the side, causing the most unsightly bunches. The largest trees, just across from her, had had it's lower half adjusted too, the roots carefully coaxed into a hollow.

She almost thought of him being Fey when she saw him. But that didn't seem quite right to her. He looked like every other village boy, curled up and quiet, his chest rising and falling with the easy grace granted by sleep. There was nothing of oddness or magic about him, he wore a ragged sweater and even more ragged jeans, and his hair was so curly that it hid away most of his face. Golden flowers had been tangled in his hair, so vibrant that they rivaled the sun.

He reminded her almost of the sleeping girl. The story of a Fae cursing a girl to sleep with true love's kiss or some foolish thing like that. She certainly wasn't going to kiss a boy likely a decade younger than her.

Amanda drew close, looking him over with the cautious eye of someone who has been through a great deal of trouble. She didn't doubt that this slumber was unnatural. There was something terribly fixed about it, a young boy sleeping under bright sunlight. Likely, he had been caught up in his own little game.

Or perhaps, a prize for another. She shuddered at the thought. They said Basil from the next village over had gotten killed because of that. Lured into the forest after his little brother got a bit too careless and got himself snatched up. Never came back out again. She could see this helpless young boy being stolen away and some desperate family member coming after him.

Whether that family member had survived or not was another thing. But, oh, could she leave him here? He would slow her down, yes, but she had always believed that one should always be able to make their own go at it.

She reached out a hand, throwing a terrified glance backwards before shaking him roughly. Contrary to the deepness of his slumber, he stirred immediately, blinking open sleepy eyes. He yawned, staring up at her with a look of confusion.

“Can you run?” She asked. He blinked up at her, a slow curious movement. Rather like a sleepy calf. Perhaps in another setting, she would have called it adorable, but now, it vexed her deeply. “We don’t have much time. Can you run?”

“I guess?” He yawned again, the words slurred by drowsiness, blinking rapidly. “Are we playing a game or something?”

She shuddered at the horrible words. What had the Fey been telling this poor boy? Looking at him now, she was almost certain he wasn’t Fey. There was no oddness around him and Amanda had the firm belief that every Fey was odd.

A spark of something flared in his eyes, liveliness perhaps or youthful vigor. “A game.” He murmured. He yawned again, stretched, and pushed himself out of the hollow. There was a brief moment of hesitation, the boy glancing down at where he had been sleeping. “He said I needed to sleep. It’s goof for me.”

Rather terrible, these Fey, Amanda thought scornfully. Why, she could see it now, the terrible young man luring away this boy with laughs and little games. Waiting for his guard to drop and exhaustion to take over. And then hustling him to bed like a common nursemaid. And all the while, the real terrible game was afoot and this young man was none the wiser of it.

“You can’t sleep right now, I’m afraid.” She said, her words stern. “We need to get moving. I have no idea how much time I have left but if we both want to get out of this, we need to start running now.”

He hesitated again and for a moment she was concerned she would have to leave him behind before he nodded firmly, pushing himself up. “Okay then.” He said, rather a bit more alert. “Let’s start running.”

She led him back over to the small side path, checking the sun as she went. Maybe an hour left, maybe less. It was so hard to estimate these things. Amanda turned, about to start running in the same direction but a gentle tug stopped her. “What now?” She asked, hoping he hadn’t decided to start hesitating again.

“You can’t go that way.” The boy said, gesturing at the ground. “They’ve already passed by here, you can see where the magic has left its imprint. You’ll run right into them.”

She looked at the grass doubtfully. Yes, perhaps some patches of the grass were a bit darker than the others. She had known a girl, a painter, who claimed she could tell colors that were even a shades different apart. That could be what had happened there. Or perhaps the boy was mad. “Then why not check the clearing she asked?”

The boy hummed, an oddly musical sound as he glanced back. “I suppose he thought it wouldn’t be noticed.” He said, shaking his head but luckily not dislodging the flowers. “Take just the right angle and just the right path, you know?”

It was true that if she had been a hair shorter she might not have caught the sunlight as she rushed past. She glanced back quickly, giving it a pensive look. Or if she had been a second

faster. Without the spot of sunlight, it looked like any other piece of forest, if having the trees a bit close together.

“I suppose we’ll be going the other way.” She said briskly, eyeing the boy. A trap perhaps, but some part of him felt a bit bad for him. Getting mixed up in this so young. He looked interested in whatever marks he was seeing, reaching down to drag his fingers over the ground with a happy little hum like a child delighted to discover their sibling had left behind their toys.

She caught his shoulder, pulling him back up. “We should get a move on then.” She said, glancing around warily. It wouldn’t be long before they came back to check and when that happened, she had no intentions of being around.

“Okay.” He said. She had to force herself to start running again, aching muscles screaming for a rest. The boy trailed behind, a slow sedate jog. She caught him wincing a few times. “Bit sore?” She asked sympathetically. Sleeping so long couldn’t be good for one.

He looked at her blinking rapidly. “Hurts leaving. It’s fine, I want to play anyway.” She made a sympathetic noise before focusing on her own path. Some game of the Fey no doubt, a curse or some such.

It was halfway down the path that she heard it. An angry scream, no, that did not do it justice. Not the pure raw fury. The grief. The scream of a wolf that has had its pup ripped from its side. She stumbled, fear adding speed to her footsteps. Her heart thudded against her ribs like a bird trying to escape a cage.

More likely, a Fey that has just lost an interesting toy.

It was instincts alone that had her catch the boy’s arm, pulling him along before he could stop. He tugged backwards, looking over his shoulder, a strange wildness in his blue eyes.

“I have to go back.” He said. There was another noise, like the low drawn out howl of a wolf. His breath hitched. “He wants me back. He’s mad and not in the fun way like before. I don’t think this game is fun.”

“It’ll be alright.” She said, keeping a firm grip on his arms. Just a bit sooner and he’d break out of the nasty bit of shock. “Weren’t you having fun? You enjoy games, don’t you?”

“Oh, yes.” The boy said slowly, something odd in his eyes. He shook his head like he was shaking water out of his ears, his curls flopping and forth. His next words were quicker, more confident. “I like playing them. They’re a lot of fun.”

“Then this will be fun as well.” She said, trying to keep her voice even. But she could see that she was losing him. The tugs were getting stronger and stronger and her pace was getting slower and slower. One last try, she decided, and she’d leave this young boy to his tragic fate. “Haven’t you played games with him before?”

“Oh, yes. It was fun.” There was something queer in his words, how he lingered over that last one. One hand came up to press down on his chest as if reacted to an invisible blow. “I

ran like this before. He thought it was fun when I ran and we played like that. Only once though, I've been sleeping a lot recently and he doesn't like me running around yet when I'm awake. Too early or something."

Amanda scowled, pulling him further along. "Well, there will be no more of that." She said sternly. She wasn't letting this boy get pulled along with Fae's tricks. How cruel. The boy frowned, a strangely heartbroken look. She turned her eyes again, focusing on ahead. They must have had a good lead by now. Surely, they could leave this cursed place.

Another howl, closer now. The boy flinched, her only warning.

And then, she heard Dream yell, words that seemed to echo among the trees. A sound like the rushing of wind, and the dull buzz of bees, her ears unable to make out what was said.

"Toby Underscore, return to me now!"

She yelped as she was yanked off her feet, the boy pulling back with a desperate strength. "I need to go back." He whined, his eyes unfocused. She gaped up at him, scrambling to yank him back with all the strength she had. He fumbled at her arm, trying to claw through her sleeves like a wild animal. "Let me go! I want to go home!"

"I'm not letting you go back there." She said grimly, forcing him to hold still as she dragged him further forward. He let out a high desperate whine, tugging on her heartstrings and she found herself wavering, the crueller side of herself reminding her that this was slowing her down at her own critical point. Maybe the boy would be fine.

She let go-

A heavy weight slammed into her side, flinging her to the ground with a gruesome cracking sound and a searing pain up her right side. "How dare you. Touching the prince with your filthy hands, taking him away." Someone hissed, an emphasis on hissed. She tried to force herself up, to struggle, but sharp claws pressed into her neck and instinct made her go limp. She could barely twist her head, looking at the young boy who was toddling into the forest like a lost child.

He didn't get far. Arms wrapped around him, gently pulling him into Dream's grasp. The boy hummed, burying himself in the Fae's arms with a contentness that made her gape. And even stranger, the Fae allowed it, pressing their mask into the boy's curls.

"You're supposed to be asleep still, you're far too young to be running around playing games." Dream scolded. "What were you thinking running off like that? And with a mortal no less? I was worried about you. Sappnap threw a fit when he realized you disappeared, George was about ready to go ask the Autumn Court for answers, and Skeppy had to come to soothe Bad down."

"I thought it was a game and I was bored. I've played games before." They said, their face scrunching up. "I'm pretty sure I did."

“You need to stay with me.” Dream said. Her voice dropped low, cajoling. “Do you not like playing with me? I’m sorry, sunshine, I want to play with you but I don’t want you to get hurt because we played together too early.”

She struggled to speak, wanting to tell the boy to ignore it, but her face was pushed down into the soft grass with a soft hiss. The boy glanced back, his eyes above hers, likely looking at the Fae holding her. He drooped slightly, burying his face in Dream’s cloak with a soft whine. “Sorry, Dream I just wanted to play. She said we were going to play and that I couldn’t go back.”

Did he just throw her under the carriage? Judging by the angelic look on his face as he peeked out and Dream’s sudden stare, he definitely did. Amanda felt a wave of fury, a helping hand and this was what she got. Betrayal.

“Did she?” Dream said, his voice cold. He gently smoothed a glove over the boy’s curls. “I’ll be dealing with that then. But that doesn’t get you out of trouble, sunshine. You’re going back to sleep, no more games for quite a while I think. Sam.”

He ignored the boy’s whines, looking up at the taller Fae, the one with the odd mask. From this angle, she could see that he had dark green hair, patches of mottled green covering his skin, and a gilded crown on his head. They stepped forward, bundling the boy in their arms with unexpected gentleness.

“But I don’t wanna sleep.” The boy insisted stubbornly. “It’s boring and then you have to leave to go to other places and I’m left alone while you get to play.”

“It’s for your own good.” Sam rumbled. He pulled the boy closer, dipping a head at Dream. “I can keep an eye on him from now on. Probably should make sure one of us sticks behind on the games anyways.”

“A grand coincidence that will give you some free time to mirror talk to Ponk.” Dream said, something of a spinster gossip edge to his voice. He waved a hand. “I’ll be there soon. If he wants my attention then he will get it, as much as he wants. I can take some time off of the games, this was just a little spur of the moment thing.”

Sam dipped his head, retreating into the undergrowth. The last she saw of the boy was Sam carefully combing a hand through his curls and his soft voice, talking about traps of all things. Dream gazed after them for a long moment.

Then he turned his gaze to her. “And now what will I do to you?” He said, his voice cold and cruel. “You stupid girl. It was fun in the beginning and then you had to go and do that.”

“I wasn’t going to let you hurt an innocent young boy.” She hissed as soon as the vile cat eased up slightly. “You wicked thing. Humans are just playthings to you? Aren’t they? You think you can move us around at your pleasure, chase onr through the forest and put another to sleep until you feel like pulling them out again. Wicked creatures, you lot.”

But to her surprise, Dream just threw his head back, laughing. “You really are stupid.” He said. “You thought you were rescuing a human boy?”

She paused, fumbling for her words. What did that mean? He hadn't looked Fey to her, a little odd yes, but not Fey. "Everyone deserves their escape." She said.

"He already got his. And a clever boy he was, just a bit too clever to escape. Or maybe he decided he liked my games more." Dream said, his voice oddly soft. Almost, she realized with rising horror, parental. "My dear little Changeling, such a troublemaker. The best prize I've ever gotten, if I do say so myself."

The golden flowers. The odd flashes of something dark in his hair that she thought were twigs but now with horror, realized were horns. The rage when the Fey realized she had stolen a child, the words yelled that rang through the trees.

"I was furious." He said, stalking closer. "When I realized he was gone. That someone had stolen into the special place I had built just for him, where he could take in the warm glow of the sun at my side. And rest peacefully when I had to step away. But then, you stupid mortal, you tried to take away what's mine. My little clever changeling, my Tubbo. I should kill you for that."

"Should?" She repeated, her voice shaking. He reached out, tilting up her chin with a burning hot glove. She hissed in pain, unable to pull away.

"Ant was the one to catch you and I am nothing if not an honorable man. He gets to choose what will be done to you." Dream said, his tone gleeful as he pulled away and her chin banged back down on the ground.

"You don't have to do that." Ant said. "Her fate belongs to you, I was just lucky enough to be here first."

"Your victory still, Ant. I want to tend to my child now, you can join us afterwards. Maybe invite Velvet here, I know it's been so long since you've enjoyed yourselves." Dream said, lingering over the last few words with glee.

"I think I will." Ant said thoughtfully. Neither paid attention to the human between them, not even when she began to scream, the high shrill sound of a terrified prey falling and knowing it wouldn't get back up.

"You're squeezing me."

"As if you're not trying to burrow into my chest." A soft wheeze. "No more trying to leave, Tubs. I promise, when you're ready, we'll play games together."

"I thought I was already ready. We've played before."

"We haven't played together yet. You're too young for that Tubbo"

"But I thought-

"Sleep, sunshine. Maybe we can play when you wake up next. It shouldn't be too much longer, you're developing so well."

“...Okay.”

“I love you.”

A soft yawn. “I love you too.”

And in the distance, a scream snapped to a stop.

Chapter End Notes

Tubbo's a Moobloom hybrid! I couldn't resist it. Dream was so excited when the flowers developed and he got so many cuddles. Normally Tubbo is never alone but the OC managed to catch it at just the right moment when the Fey had gotten distracted by the game. Bad times for them, Dream was furious to see his baby missing.

If you like it, comments are appreciated! I love reading what you guys have to say.

Coffee Shop AU

Chapter Notes

This is for Kindryte! Thanks for creating this chaos with me, haha! A gift for over seven years of friendship.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The great thing about opening a cafe was that you didn't have to worry about waking up at three AM to prep if you didn't sleep.

The second greatest thing was the unlimited coffee.

Tubbo took a deep breath as he took the coffee Tommy passed him, taking a long sip. It was so bitter that it made his mouth dry and he let out a happy sigh. Truly, ambrosia of the gods. Water? Wine? Nectar? Who cared?

There was only coffee.

"We ran out of the lemon scones yesterday." Tubbo said with a hum, pulling the daily binder closer. "That's the one we tested with a new frosting, right?"

"All my scones are awesome." Tommy mumbled into his coke. But even as he said it, he shoved a recipe card towards him. Tubbo examined it for a second before nodding to himself in satisfaction. "But yeah, that's the fucking one."

Yep, that fit his thoughts. Swapping the icing to a lemon juice base had really improved the scones. "Think we can do a double batch today?"

"My croissant dough is still chilling, fuck." Tommy said. He ran a hand through his hair, leaving floury streaks. "I fucking got this, but you need to take over the macarons. They're a fucking bitch."

"No problem." Tubbo said with a smile as he set his mug down and started rolling up his sleeves. He always took over the macarons, but they had always played the elaborate pass on game ever since Tommy finally joined him at the cafe.

It was a cozy little place. A couple of old computers he rebuild lined one wall. Sewn tapestries covered the cracked walls after Tommy had a fit of inspiration.

Tubbo particularly liked the middle finger one.

A few bar stools and tables made up their regularly sitting options but most people migrated to the fireplace away, set up with a lumpy couch and cushions galore. They were still in color

and size order after a student doing their communication disorders PhD reorganized them in a fit of pique.

A few plants lent the room bright bursts of color. Shroud, Tommy's spider plant. Spins, Tubbo's bee balm in its own bee shaped pot. Michael was missing from his place of honor, currently at his co-parent's house.

Tubbo's eyes skipped over by the coat rack by the door.

It felt wrong to get rid of them. And there was something freeing about tossing the fur edged blue coat and suit jacket on that coat rack, salvaged from a dumpster. But it didn't mean he liked looking at it, how it seemed like it was waiting for one of them to toss them on and walk out the door.

The caffeine carried him through the morning prep as he and Tommy argued and fumbled their way through the million fiddly little chores that had to be done every morning.

By the time Tubbo flipped the open sign, he was already on his third espresso and starting to wonder if he was having a stroke or tasting colors.

Looked like the coffee today was going to be great.

As soon as he flipped the sign, the first of the college students began to stagger in. Most of them didn't bother with the board.

"Just inject it directly into my veins." One student pleaded, dark eye circles so dark that they looked drawn on with sharpie. They wobbled, clinging onto a textbook like it was the sole thing keeping them in this world. "End me."

"Liquid fuel, coming right up." Tubbo said, tapping the order in and cheerily taking their cash. He set the first of twenty espresso shots to brew, the crushed caffeine pills already in the mug. After a moment, he added a few ice cubes.

Hydration was probably important, right?

"You're an angel in this world." The student said, chugging half as soon as it hit their hand. Their pupils expanded as they shuddered, staggering off to one of the couches. Tubbo was already moving onto the next order.

Now you may be wondering. How does a not yet adult open a cafe? Legal inheritance? Through a silent guardian managing it? A city who doesn't have child labor laws?

Trick question.

The answer is fraud.

And lots of it.

"How's my favorite schat?" Tubbo took a deep stabilizing breath. And another swig of the lukewarm coffee he had kept at hand. If he was a weaker man, who would question if this

fraud had been worth it. “You ever think you should cut back on that?”

“Probably when you cut back on alcohol.” Tubbo said innocently, looking up at the person in front of the register. He kept a tight hold on his mug, eyeing them suspiciously.

If he swapped his coffee with hot cocoa one more time...

Well. It was actually really good cocoa. At least from the smell, and the hideously expensive looking packaging. But it had taken forever to get out of accepting it! Caffeineless!

Tubbo would riot.

Schlatt tapped the corner. “Hey, no need for all this aggression! I’m a paying customer. And your investor.”

“My major pain, is what I would like to call it.” Tubbo mumbled to himself. He cleared his throat before Schlatt could speak, blinking innocently under the other’s skeptically amused look. “What brings you here?”

“Oh, you know, just checking in on some investments.” Schlatt said, leaning on the corner. “See, I was looking at article 22 on our contract, and I noticed you’re getting pretty close for when the interest on your loan is going to be kicking in. Now, remember, you agreed to an interest rate of 250%-“

“Mm.” Tubbo took another gulp of coffee. He should have gone for something stronger today.

“Now, I’m hoping you’re prepared to pay back my money.” Schlatt said, his grin stretching wider. Tubbo would feel scared if he wasn’t so buzzed on caffeine that he could smell colors. “But if you can’t, I’m willing to cut a deal.”

“Mm.”

Did he still have the can of monster in the fridge?

“I could even offer you the family rate!” Schlatt said.

Tubbo rolled his eyes. “A guest mistook you as my dad once.” He said. And Schlatt had been joking about it ever since.

“I even brought the new contract!” Schlatt said, pulling the papers from his suit jacket with a flourish and sliding them across the counter. Tubbo eyed them for a long moment, worry holding his hand still.

On one hand, Schlatt was a pain. On the other, the other absolutely terrified him and Tubbo was completely aware that one wrong step and he was screwed.

Part of his attitude was a facade and he was scared to admit it.

But, he wasn't going to reveal that to Schlatt. Tubbo pulled the papers closer, happy to see Schlatt had put them in comic sans. Likely to make things harder, but hah! That made it easier for his dyslexic eyes to read. Jokes on him.

Tubbo read for a few moments. Raised an eyebrow. Took another sip. He slowly slid the papers back. "These are the wrong papers."

"No. No! They're the right ones." Schlatt said, not even looking at the papers.

"Schlatt, this is an adoption contract, not a loan agreement." Tubbo pointed out. But the segue gives him enough time to think, to find a loophole to pick apart, his brain working furiously. "Besides, the interest isn't coming due soon, because the interest only comes due after the cafe is featured in a major newspaper."

"Ah but here's the thing. You will be." Schlatt said, smugly. Tubbo flinched as the other ruffled a hand through his hair, looking strangely proud. "The SMP Times--"

"If you look at clause 226, point b, a major newspaper is defined as a paper-only newspaper with a readership of at least 25,000 people per month." Tubbo recited. "And last I checked, the SMP times was not that."

He knew what he was getting into when he signed that paperwork. Fae had taken to the world of bureaucracy like ducks to water. A world that thrives on adding in tiny loopholes, hidden meaning, and eking out every last bit of profit? Might as well just open the door wide and let them in.

There were lawyers that specialized in making fae contracts or getting out of one. People who studied their entire lives on laws and nuance and fae etiquette. It would have been the smarter route and the one most recommended. But those were expensive, and might be bored Fae themselves, so Tubbo went with the next best thing.

Giving up sleep and going down the Wikipedia rabbit hole on contract law and arming himself with all his childhood stories.

It took everything he had not to flinch back, feeling oddly guilty as Schlatt's eyes went dark and angry, and strangely still a little proud. "Chip off the old block, schat." Schlatt said. "Sure you don't want to sign those papers--"

"Oh, that would be an awful idea." Tubbo said, shaking his head. "Like, for the both of us."

Should Tubbo be concerned that Schlatt was carrying around adoption paperwork? Maybe. But Tubbo only approached him for a loan, so that worked well enough for him. But the jump from loans to stealing human children was probably not too different?

Jokes on him though, Tubbo did not plan to get sold into slavery today.

"Uh, no, I'd be fine with it."

"Mm." Tubbo said, eyes sliding to the side. Well, he at least didn't want to become some fae servant. "According to article 13, you're scaring off customers. I'm gonna need to ask you to

step to the side so I can serve whoever is next.”

“Fine. You know, as much as I’m enjoying our little banter thing, you’ve really got to just sign it.” Schlatt said, sweeping the paperwork away. “I’ll be over there if you change your mind. Go make some money, schat!”

“What does that even mean, boss man?” Tubbo said, but Schlatt was already sauntering away. Tubbo added a mental note to trade Fundy some berry pie to get their work on translating swears.

He wasn’t sure how the fox fae knew Dutch, but at the very least, they took berry pie for most trades.

The flow of customers ebbed and rose over the course of the day. But that didn’t mean Tubbo was pleased when the latest customer squeaked an apology and bolted to the back of the cafe.

“Dream.” Tubbo sighed. His coffee had run out. This was truly abysmal.

The smiling porcelain mask stared back at him, just as eerie as the day he had first seen it. “It’s time for your inspection.” Dream said.

Tubbo took a deep breath. “You inspected us last month. Last two weeks. Last week. Yesterday.”

“Inspections must be random and held at random intervals to be trustworthy.” Dream said instantly like that hid the note of mirth in his voice. “Are you suggesting I break the laws for you?”

“No.” Tubbo sighed, far too aware of the keen eyes on him waiting to trip him up. “Right. Let me just open the counter door.”

He grumbled only a little as his dodge away from Dream’s hand didn’t work, the other ruffling a hand through his hair. What was with people and his hair?

Tommy, luckily, was focused on the chocolate chip cookies so he only glared as Dream stepped in, hunkering down over the dough. He was oddly convinced that hurling swears over dough would turn the dough sour.

“Tommy.” Dream said, nodding his head. He reached up, lacing his fingers behind his head.

Tommy glared harder.

Then again, Tubbo was oddly convinced of the validity of blowing up the sun. That’s what made them such good friends.

Dream stalked the kitchen like a predator. There was no other way to describe his slow gait, the steady sweep of the mask. Waiting for something to slip up.

“I’m noticing some evidence of spoilage.” Dream said. “You are aware that any spoilage of fruits used for cooking is against health laws?”

Tubbo leaned around him, the caffeine the only barrier from flinching when Dream's arm settled around his shoulders. A persistent weight and reminder.

"Big Man, the fruit has a couple of brown spots." Tubbo said, skeptically examining the apples. Only one had a few spots, not even blemishes against the ruby red skin. Probably just grew like that.

"A few spots can indicate spoilage." Dream points out, his voice oddly gleeful. "Adding a spoiled fruit to the batch... you could get so many people sick. A violation of health laws."

It was a toss up, Tubbo reflected, on whether Schlatt or Dream annoyed him more some days. Schlatt was a pain with contract law. Every conversation was a constant back and forth about some little minutiae of the contract.

Dream made his work a game. A constant game, where he would push the envelope as much as he could. Tubbo was pretty sure that if it wasn't for the amount of money they spent, the grocer would have put a hit on them.

Inspections were a very delicate game. He couldn't break the rules, also known as food and safety laws. But sometimes it just got ridiculous.

"You and your friends egged my store once." Tubbo said dryly. But only half focused on his words. His brain was working furiously at this latest dilemma.

"Me? Them?" Dream's voice was bemused but the idea but Tubbo couldn't help but notice that he hadn't actually answered the question.

Fae couldn't lie after all.

"That was a really long morning, I didn't even eat breakfast-" Tubbo paused. Hm. That was an idea.

"Unfortunately, I think this counts as a loss for you." Dream said, far too cheery. The porcelain dug into Tubbo's shoulder and he forced himself to let out a steady breath. "You know what the price of that is."

Making that deal had been incredibly stupid.

But when strings got pulled and inspection got called and he needed just two weeks to get everything together. Just two weeks. Opening a cafe was so much harder than the cafe AU fanfics made it sound like.

Dream took the deal to leave for two weeks. They passed when he came back.

Unfortunately, he just kept coming back.

"Good thing this isn't being served to customers." Tubbo said, and this time the cheeriness wasn't forced. He snatched the apple out of the bin, shining it on his sweater.

He took a moment to check it. Just in case. Fae food always told on itself. Too perfect, too tempting, too...

Could uncanny valley exist for food?

And then he took a big bite. "Just my breakfast." He remarked. He has to make himself stay steady under the state of the mask. Too hard to tell if his gambit worked, but Tubbo liked to think he was getting good at the tells.

"Consumption laws state food can't be served to customers." Dream said, so soft that Tubbo had to strain to hear it. He forced himself not to grin.

"I'm not a customer and home kitchens are not held to commercial laws. This apple is mine, it won't be served, and I'm allowed to eat whatever I want." Tubbo said, taking another bite. Dream was so full of himself sometimes. He had eaten way worse apples than this back in the orphanage and no one had cared. It hadn't killed him.

When he hears Dream huff against his ear, he knows he's won. Dream leans on him hard for a moment before pulling away, turning to survey the rest of the kitchen.

A tiny snort from the corner. Tubbo let himself smile, a bit more genuine this time.

"The sink--"

"Up to code, you're not measuring the temperature at the right spot."

"The fridge--"

"Can be this temperature because it also stores meat for the sandwiches which provides a different overall range."

Dream's mask tilted at Tubbo. Tubbo tilted his head back. At this point, he felt like all the food safety laws he knew could be oozing out of his ears.

Why couldn't Dream have found some other kind of game fun? Like a manhunt through the woods or something? But nooooo, apparently one of the most terrifying fae on the block decided that he was going to terrorize people as a food inspector.

"We could play another game if you just lost this one already." Dream said, head still tilted. Tubbo paused, considering that.

"I'm satisfied with my cafe." He said, feeling Tommy's eyes on his back.

Dream huffed. "It would be so much more fun if I could teach you play some of our other games." He complained as he walked towards the door. "For now, you've passed."

Oh, he was definitely going to be interfering again soon. Tubbo took another bite of his apple to suppress his sigh. His shoulders tingled with phantom warmth that didn't fade even as Dream pushed through the kitchen door.

He knew he'd find fading golden freckles on his shoulders.

"Well, the bitch fucked us over." Tommy said, bumping the oven door shut. "I had those apples perfectly counted to make the last batch of miniature apple pies.

Tubbo clicks his tongue, considering. Tommy had always been practical in how he kept track of the kitchen. If he said there were not enough apples, there weren't enough. And the apple pies were one of their cornerstone items, with the biggest rush just before close as students snatched up anything sweet in sight in an effort to cram as much sugar in their veins as possible.

"I'll run out and get some more, Big T." He said finally. "It should only take fifteen minutes to go around the corner, and the bells at the counter if they need coffee. I'll put the sign up."

"I ain't fucking doing coffee again."

Tubbo chuckled. "You are really good at it." He said. "That one regular, with the plush rat, still raves about it."

"I was trying to poison that maid outfit wearing bitch." Tommy snorted. Tubbo rolled his eyes. And somehow, he had concocted something that the other came back and still tried to get it. Only Tommy. "Fucking fine, but pick me up more Cokes when you get there."

"Aye, aye, Captain." Tubbo said, pretending to salute. Tommy gives him the middle finger and Tubbo is still chuckling when he steps out the back door.

A sunshower. Tubbo closed his eyes, tipping his head back for a moment and letting himself enjoy the warm rain. The smell of wet dirt- Petri dish? Some kind of funny name like that.

It was one of his favorite bits of weather around here and he gives himself this moment before he finally starts walking, and then jogging. Finally moving feels like such a relief after being cooped up behind the counter all day, turbocharging his bloodstream with caffeine.

It's an easy route, a quiet one. He could do it in his sleep.

He turned the final corner, his steps suddenly lagging when he saw what was happening.

Not the person. They were very very clearly a tourist and Tubbo automatically found himself categorizing the ease of pickpocketing, coming up with a very satisfying answer. They hadn't even bothered with getting a wallet holder, instead hovering their hand over their pocket occasionally.

Like setting out a neon billboard. Luckily for them, Tubbo tried to be careful about what laws he broke now. Never smart to be busted for something small and have his careful face setup tumble

Their clothing was practical but over the top for the weather. A full length rain jacket despite the light sunshower, an umbrella hanging loosely in their other hand.

Perfectly normal. This city was small but it still had tourists.

The problem was where they were going. For a moment, Tubbo opened his mouth before closing it, chewing on his bottom lip.

Sometimes, Tubbo thought, when he was a kid, he would imagine a place like this.

Not the gate. It was beautiful in its own way, set into the wall and carved in wood. It formed a gentle arch over head, sweeping down into the a wooden bar embedded into the ground before sweeping back up the gates. The wood itself had been carved in the shape of mushrooms.

All the luscious fruits and vegetables, hanging there ready and ripe for the taking. Not the wizened crabapples they would scavenge, but plump and colorful. They glimmered under the rain, tempting.

Closest to the gate, he could spy giant apples that were so yellow they looked gold. Juicy pears that were so heavy that the tree was practically bending over. The grand vines sprawled across their supports, offering fat juicy grape bunches to anyone who wanted to pluck one.

Entangled in the orchard were massive pumpkins, so perfect they seemed to come out of a photograph. They nestled against ripe round watermelon, honeydew, cantaloupe, and more.

Beyond that, almost hidden so you had to strain your eyes to see it, was more. The effect almost coaxed a person to tilt their head, to lean closer, until finally they took a few steps in. Purple fruit the size of apples that seemed to glow with an eerie light. Cherry blossoms so bright that they painted the forest floor pink. Sunflowers waiting to be cracked open for their seeds.

Not all mushroom circles were planted in the ground these days.

He had been here many times and never had he seen the gate closed and locked.

Tubbo winced and turned away as he watched the tourist trail over to a picture perfect apple tree, reaching up to pluck a hanging apple just within reach.

As much as he got taunted for it at times, he wasn't a savior. He pressed his luck and got out with himself intact, for now.

Going back twice never ended well in a story. He'd only burn that possibility for one person.

"Leaving without saying goodbye?"

Tubbo paused. "Niki." He greeted. He offered a cautious wave as the other leaned against the gate, watching him with amusement.

The tourist was gone now.

"Tubbo! Normally you're not out at this time." Niki said, leaning closer. She swept a lock of her pink hair back to tuck behind her ear. "Everything alright?"

“All good. Just ended up a bit short on apples and Tommy sent me out.” Tubbo said. He glanced behind her, watching as the footsteps in the grass slowly disappeared.

Niki clapped her hands together, beaming. “I can fix you up real quick!” She said. Before Tubbo could say a word, she scurried over to an apple tree, plucking the biggest and juiciest looking one.

It was the same tree that the tourist had reached forward, he noticed, his stomach lurching. And he also couldn’t help but notice that it looked even lusher now.

She offered the apple with a sweet smile. This close, Tubbo couldn’t help but inhale the sweet scent of the apple. It mixed wonderfully with the rain.

For a moment, the scent of gingerbread and burning wood seemed to grow stronger. Niki hummed slightly. “For you.” She said.

“I couldn’t, the price I’d have to give you for this is way too much.” Tubbo said, swallowing back his worries.

Meeting Niki hadn’t been an accident.

After... they... had gotten them blacklisted from the local grocers, Tubbo had gotten desperate. He got enough blackmail on one to get them to deliver, but even they had delayed their delivery by a few days. A few days Tubbo couldn’t afford when he had gotten a business up and running.

To fill the gap, he came to the Spring Orchard. He ignored the big ‘You Pick’ signs written in elegant script, instead waiting at the gates.

Eventually, Niki herself came out to see him. By the end of it, Tubbo was swaying with exhaustion, he had nearly eaten fae food five times, and if he ever saw another flower, he was going to blow it up.

But he had enough fruits and vegetables to tide the cafe over for a few days of pastries.

Fae food wasn’t safe, but that was most of improperly negotiated and if it went unpaid.

The latent magic of fae food was not the best for one, but taking without paying meant leaving a wide opening for a fae to demand what price they wanted. You couldn’t get a return after eating, after all.

And the taste was divine. Even if the ones given were a hollow echo, Tubbo had refused to take a single bite.

Even an echo could be a trap.

“Everytime I see you, you get even cuter.” Niki said fondly. “Come inside, Puffy would love to catch up.”

Despite himself, Tubbo hesitated.

“The bees miss you.” Niki said, placing her chin on her hand and Tubbo wavered. He could almost hear their sweet little buzzes now.

Forget the fruit, giant bees? That liked to be held and petted?

That was where it was at.

It was hard not to genuinely like Puffy and Niki. Puffy was terrifying and incredible and he was pretty sure her stories of being a pirate queen were actually true and she joked about showing him how to sword fight. And Niki was sweet and genuine and a little bit vicious in a way that actually made him trust her more because someone who was only nice got on his last nerve.

It scared him more that he liked them. The fruit situation had only just barely not ended in catastrophe and sometimes, when it rained, his legs still hurt.

Even if something told him they actually meant their honeyed words that they wanted him to stay in an... actual staying way. Not whatever happened to any poor sucker who wandered in.

“I’ve gotta run.” Tubbo said. “Tommy really wants those specific kinds of apples.”

It’s not enough, he can tell by the way that Niki’s eyes go a bit dark and he makes a note to remember to tell the grocer to raise their guards.

Niki was the type to make a point.

He turns around and forced himself to walk away, slowly, steadily, but quickly. Too fast, and he looked like prey. Too slow, and the grass would trip him up.

The grocer sighs when he walks in and Tubbo tries to be quick. He checks the apples extra carefully, wincing when one turns up a little too perfect.

He passes that one to the grocer. “Just thought you should know.” He said while the grocer stares down at it with the gaze of someone who is so deeply done with it all.

“What should I even do with this?” The grocer said, throwing their hands up.

“Throw it back over the wall?” The grocer sent him an incredulous look. “I’ve done it before, she just patted me on the head and replanted.”

“You folk.” The grocer muttered, placing the apple below the counter. Hopefully, it would end up well. Tubbo enjoyed stories, but he enjoyed having a reliable grocer more.

The gate is still open when he passes. It’s never closed.

He bursts back into the kitchen to the sound of swearing as Tommy aggressively puts together an absolutely adorable cat-head foam latte. Contrary to his belief around baked goods, Tommy believes that swearing made the coffee better.

Tubbo uses the moments to put the apple in the bin, stretching for a moment before heading back to the daily grind.

There's a new flower pot by his register, Tommy's eyes skipping over it as he walks back. Tubbo sighs, looking away. Pink and blue and yellow, perfect length and size for flower crowns. Or one singular flower crown.

He knows Tommy didn't put it there.

Slowly, the hours drag on.

Tubbo grimaced, rocking back and forth as he worried at the cuffs of his sweater. One deep breath. Two.

He hadn't seen Fundy today.

Fundy was sporadic but if Schlatt came by, Fundy was practically a guarantee to be lurking somewhere. And Schlatt was still here, still leaning in a chair that made it more reminiscent of a throne, phone in one hand as he texted. But there was something that guaranteed the other disappeared.

The Winter Court.

Tubbo knew there was some kind of history between Fundy and the Winter Court. He never prodded too much, the relationship between them built off of fake goodwill, sweet berry pie, and...

Honestly, Tubbo thought Fundy pitied him. He'd say empathize, but Fundy had tried to kill him once.

The Winter Court was the entire reason Tubbo opened this cafe.

It had been a massive fustercluck. He should have been warier, more careful when the little cafe caught Tommy's eye in the market. Tommy had been excited when he saw the flyer in the window calling for a baker.

The money offered was more than they had ever scraped together by themselves. Tubbo networked and worked every angle he had but there was only so far he could go without taking on more education or....

Very large fae shaped risks.

But after all that careful planning, Tommy stumbled right into a fae run cafe.

After the third day, they simply took him. And Tubbo was not allowing that.

It's one thing if Tommy had agreed, but he was pretty sure luring someone in with a job and then kidnapping them was slavery. Or something. But they didn't ask (and he was right!)

Fueled by compressed spite and white hot rage, Tubbo opened his own cafe. And poached Tommy back. He was pretty sure they wanted him dead for that. The protection he could offer only lasted as long as his cafe was running.

When the chime came, more crystalline than usual, he wasn't surprised.

Tubbo closed his eyes for a moment, taking a deep breath. At least The Blade wasn't here today. But that didn't mean he enjoyed seeing Philza, inspecting his counter with a patronizing smile.

"Have you ever thought of giving it up, mate?" Philza said. Tubbo stared down at the cup in his hands, trying to convince himself not to throw it at the other's head. "It can't be good for you, running a cafe this young."

"I manage." Tubbo said, not committing. He set the cup down and picked up another to wipe down.

Philza pursed his lips. "Our cafe could use a manager." He offered, and Tubbo paused. That was a first that they offered. They tried to poach Tommy back regularly.

Never once had they offered Tubbo a job.

But as he was thinking it, he was already shaking his head. "I enjoy having my own cafe." He said, eyes narrowing. His foot was starting to jitter.

Part of him thought that the manager position was a way to get Tommy back, and put him into a servant position.

But Philza's eyes were strangely... fond almost? He looked like he did when he looked at Tommy. Now that Tubbo was thinking about it, the winter fae had seemed less hostile the last few times that they met. He... wasn't sure how he felt about that.

"Mate, you're about to rub a hole into that mug."

Tubbo jumped, nearly dropping the mug. "It can handle it." He said, setting down the mug still. Philza snorted.

"The offer is open." He said, leaning on the corner. "How much longer do you think you can keep this place running?"

"I manage." Tubbo said, mind darting around those implications. Hm. Would it be better or worse that they wanted him too?

There was a rattle of a chair falling to the floor. Tubbo glanced to the left, barely catching the last two college kids who were shuffling out like spooked zombies. But his gaze was blocked by Schlatt who looked practically *volcanic*.

Tubbo stared down at the mug in his hands, and really wished he could bite someone as the yelling began to grow.

“If you break anything, I’m billing you for it.” He said spitefully. Let them have a taste of fae rules.

Then he started filling a cup with espresso.

Later, it’s quiet again. Later, after the glass has been swept up. Later after the last of the kitchen is tidy. Later after they feast on leftover sandwiches and pastries. Later after Tubbo shrugs on a pair of worn pajamas he can’t bear to part with, even if they’re now more gray than yellow.

He sits at the computer, in their apartment above the cafe. It’s small, but it’s growing on him.

Tubbo cracked his knuckles, typing up his first email of the day. It’s a recipe, in response to one Jimmy sent before. But before he can finish, a new email came through.

“YOU WOULD NOT BELEIEVE WHAT THAT RED SWEATERED AWFUL MAN HAS DONE.”

“What.”

“HE SET A RACCOON LOOSE JN MY PLACE. NORMAN MY POOR BABY BOY.”

“Is Norman okay”

“Yes my brave boy was so good but I could t even yell at him because he threatens to pull his investment whhhhhhhy did I get it from him”

Tubbo grinned as another rapid fire email came in. It might be easier to text or something but Tubbo preferred it this way. Rapid fire emails, chains spanning on for forty plus emails.

“You think that’s bad my investor and the awful cafe guy who must never be named had a fight in my cafe”

“You should calm the police.”

“Hhaha cant its against my contract”

“That’s illegal!”

“Says the guy get haressedd by a prabk youtube fae giy.”

“Are you still on the fae thing.”

“yessss? It’s correct”

“Nah, man, mafia.”

“Lol no.”

“You literally said your investor is trying to drain you dry! You’re rival brought his mysteriously reslly buff kid to intimidate you! That’s straight up mafia.”

“Fae, how did your guy get a raccoon in your place.”

“Mafia, you said red is bad to fae.”

“I dunno if it stops them from wearing it, just good for you to wear it”

“HE JUST HARASSES ME ANYWYAS STRAIGHT MAFIA I HEARD HIS FRIEND CONCING SOMEONE TO GIVE HIM PROTEction money.”

“Is that the one who gave you a marriage contract”

“The weird prank? Yeah. If I had a nickel for everytime I got one of those, I’d have two nickels which is kinda funny”

“Ah yeah that guy, can’t believe you messed up that quote was the other one that farmer guy who keeps giving you fruit because I told you not to eat the fruit big man”

“Whait how the quote”

“Anyways got another adoption contract again which is ??? Also rival cafe person tried to hire me”

“NO NO NO don’t go down that road”

“Nah, I’m invested in this place plus like you get a healthy dose of Fear when you see a man get eaten by an apple tree”

“????”

“Fae, big man. Fae. Here’s the recipe.”

“Thanks, and go to bed, aren’t you like a kid. A small man.”

“I will grind your kneecaps into our pastry special.”

“Please don’t.”

Tubbo snorted as he sent over the recipe he finally drafted, clicking to exit the email window when no new one came through. Jimmy was probably going to be hypocritical again and not sleep.

He could talk about the importance of sleep all he wanted, because he sure didn’t follow it. But today had been exhausting.

Tubbo let the light click off, settling into bed with a sigh.

Tomorrow, he’d have to get up and do it all over again. Get up far too early, deal with customers, deal with fae. Not quite the same but enough that he knew what was coming.

But here, with Tommy a warm weight in the bed and already snoring, Tubbo couldn't find himself regretting a single thing.

"We've got our own little cafe AU here." He said with a snort. Their own little cafe arc. Even if he was pretty sure most cafe AUs didn't have copious amounts of lawbreaking. Or the fae/mafia even if Jimmy was definitely Very Wrong despite his Very Compelling red string conspiracy board.

"Go the fuck to sleep, Tubs."

Chapter End Notes

Had to sneak in a lil Wild West Changeling at the end there, we had such a good time making their coffee shop AU.

Unofficial Ending: A new beginning (a new ending)

Chapter Notes

This one has actually been percolating for a long time! I could never figure out how I wanted to write it, but I suddenly got some inspiration! This one was fun to write, I knew I always wanted to do a spin off with these three.

And done just in time for the holiday!

Happy Halloween!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Ranboo nodded, looking sympathetic. He ducked around Tubbo, unlocking the wooden door and swinging it open. Tubbo shivered as a chill breeze slipped through. “Luckily, it’s not too far from our house to the Autumn Court. But, uh, I can walk you to Spring or Summer, if you’d like? If those work better?”

Tubbo paused, considering it. All of those were fine options. But despite himself, he hesitated, thinking over the options. Autumn might be best, if it wasn’t too far. He wouldn’t have to trouble Ranboo and he could get a quicker start on his already tight deadline. But Tubbo shivered as a cold breeze drifted over him.

But did he really want to head straight to the Court that was allied with Winter?

“Could we go to Spring?” He mumbled. He felt a bit guilty for saying it, knowing he’d give Ranboo a longer walk. But the other just smiled at him. Like it wasn’t a problem at all.

“Yeah! Uh, no problem. Follow me.”

The path took them past trees in full autumnal colors and what looked like an endless desert. Laughter in the trees, whistles in darkened parts of the forest. Several times, Tubbo thought he saw things dart past, red like fox fur or lime green. Several times Tubbo had jumped at an odd sound but Ranboo kept walking. Despite their nervousness, Ranboo seemed to take all the oddities around them in a stride. Tubbo envied him.

Blessedly the other was quiet. Tubbo didn’t think he could talk right now, too wrapped up in second guessing his own decision. Whether it was actually a good idea to come to this Court, so far from where he knew. But it was too late to back out now, at least without evidence. After all, he had already made Ranboo walk him all the way here.

“We’re here.” Tubbo flinched, looking up. Past Ranboo, he could see an orchard. The trees were laden in flowers and unripened fruit.

It looked... normal. Ranboo rubbed the back of his head. "This is the Spring Court. I'd tell you more but I kind of have to head back."

"Makes sense. Sorry for making you walk so far." Tubbo said with a wince. But there was a clearly laid out path and he couldn't see anything waiting in the trees.

"It was really no problem." Ranboo said, waving his hands. "Good luck on your quest!"

"Thank you." Tubbo said. He watched as Ranboo walked past him, kept watching until the other had disappeared into the distance.

Tubbo took a deep breath, turning to look at the path. He was alone now. He knew he would have to be but he still didn't like the feeling. "You got this." He mumbled, bracing himself to take the next step on a very long quest.

"Got what?" Tubbo let out a startled yelp, stumbling and falling to the ground. He looked up, breath catching when he saw a Fae standing just off the path.

The Fae brushed their messy brown curls away from their eyes and Tubbo repressed the urge to bolt back down the path. So much for the next step. If Tommy could see him right now, Tubbo reflected, he'd probably be cackling.

The Fae's eyes had no sclera or Iris. They were almost completely violet, the only break being a lime green swirl in the center. It was, Tubbo noted with horrified fascination, the same pattern as his sweater.

He really wasn't used to how odd the Fey could look, he thought with a shudder. There was something inherently distressing about seeing a person just a step to the left of what they should look like. If he didn't look at their eyes, or the glowing book in their hand, he could imagine the other browsing the village markets.

"Got what? You're looking pretty confident, man." The Fae said. It was distressingly human, the way they smiled. Tubbo expected sharper teeth. "Did I startle you?"

"I'm not going to tell you that." Tubbo said, standing up and brushing himself off. There was no way he was going to trust this stranger. From what he had gleaned from Ranboo and Purpled's reactions, his quest was big and risky and most definitely pissed off the Winter Court. If he slipped it to the wrong person, there was no way he'd bring Tommy home.

"Aw, don't be like that." The Fae said. To Tubbo's frustration, when he started walking, the Fae followed him. "I'm Karl. What's your name?"

"Tubbo." He said, trying to pick up his speed. Somehow, the Fae was already a half step behind him, even as Tubbo started to hover below jogging, they continued to calmly amble along. Never falling behind despite their slow speed. "Why are you following me?"

"You look like somebody I know." Karl said, tilting his head in the corner of Tubbo's eye. "I mean, of course you're not them because they're dead. But it made me curious so I thought I'd say hello."

Well, that wasn't ominous at all. "Did you kill them?" Tubbo asked, morbidly curious. What must it like to be immortal? To see people with the same face as someone already dead? He had heard once, from a drunken scholar, that people had doppelgangers Maybe fae related but maybe just normal, none could tell. They said if you meet yours, to kill them just in case.

Should he feel relieved, to know someone with a face like his was dead?

"I didn't stop their death." Karl said. Their tone was oddly calm, for it being something that brought Tubbo to their attention instead? "So what brings you here?"

"I'm looking for the Spring Queen." Tubbo said. He didn't think it would help to share that much and maybe Karl would be willing to tell him where she was. "I want to make a deal with her."

"That's a tough one." Karl said, looking like he was thinking it over. The book in their hand shifted in their grip and Tubbo glanced at it. It didn't look too dangerous, but you never knew. "I don't know where she is but I'm willing to keep you company until you find her."

"I don't need company." Tubbo said, turning his gaze away. The only company he had ever needed was Tommy's and there was no way this Fae could ever fill that gap.

"Don't be silly." Karl said. "Everyone needs company."

And the worst of all, he kind of liked it. Karl was fun to talk to. He had a multitude of stories and no matter how many times Tubbo asked, didn't want payment. Tubbo kept offering anyways, too wary of it being a trap to get him to let down his guard. But every time, Karl said no. He just wanted to share with him. Before long, Tubbo had already gotten drawn into his many stories of the various trials Karl would go through with his friends, all competing for some sort of prize.

He found himself sharing a little bit more than he wanted to but it was all small stuff really. Nothing that could be used to manipulate him. Little things, like his favorite color or that he liked bees.

Practical, Tubbo knew. Even if Karl didn't want payment, it was risky to let a Fae give too freely. Too easily for some breach in etiquette to occur, a lack of reciprocity. At least with a few facts, he could argue he was sharing freely as well.

"I'll need to go real quick." Karl said after wrapping up another story. "I need to talk to someone."

"Who do you need to talk to?" Tubbo said. Despite himself, he felt a flash of disappointment. It wasn't like Karl had to stick around him and really, he was safer by not talking to the Fey. It was just nice having company as he wandered around because the Spring Queen? Much harder to find than he hoped.

And no matter how much he prodded, his sneaking suspicion that Karl was more than he looked, the other kept their mouth shut on where she could be.

“It won’t take me long.” Karl said. “And maybe when I get back, I can tell you about my fiancés.”

“Fiancés?” Tubbo said. But Karl was walking deeper into the orchard, quickly vanishing amongst the plants. Tubbo shook his head, looking back at the path ahead. He set the matter of Fiancés aside, maybe a quiet mystery to occupy him in the future. In bed, why he listened to Tommy cursing over his newest sewing project.

It didn’t matter. He had a quest to complete.

“Niki, I don’t think you understand, I want him.” Karl said. He leaned against the tree, watching as Niki carefully put together a bouquet.

“Trust me, I’ve noticed.” Niki said giggling. But her eyes were dark when she looked up. “But why should I let you have him? I would like a child myself.”

Karl squared his shoulders, determined. He and his fiancés had been talking about children for ages but never found anyone they were interested in. Tubbo hit all the right points for them. “We’ve been friends for a long time.” He said. “And you know how important having a child would mean to us. And Tubbo’s stubborn, he needs room to roam. Places to explore. With us, he can see all the Courts instead of staying in Spring.”

Niki hummed thoughtfully. Karl fidgeted, nervous. He needed to nail this down now before Niki met him and decided she was going to claim him instead.

Karl was lucky to have met Tubbo first. While he and his fiancés were relatively high in the hierarchies of the Courts, they didn’t have the basis to challenge a royal.

Well. He could maybe do it. If he got the Beast to back him up and used the Inbetween as a threat. But he didn’t want that. He liked his current role. And stumbling over Tubbo, wide eyed, wary, but still so curious? It felt like the other had been nudged into his path.

Maybe he was. Future him could be a weirdo sometimes.

But he knew his fiancés would love Tubbo and that meant he had to strike now while Niki was still thinking.

They had the time to wait. Karl would always ensure that. But he didn’t want to. He wanted to give them anything they’d ever want on a silver platter. Love, rings, a Changeling child. Everything.

“You’ll owe me a favor.” Niki said and Karl’s shoulders dipped in relief. “Oh, don’t look at me like that. Nothing too serious or anything that will hurt your family. Just full use of your services later on.”

“We can negotiate that.” Karl said. He had a good feeling what kind of services Niki wanted. A few centuries ago, he might have denied it, but he had grown into his abilities by now.

Besides, it would be worth it to make them happy. Tubbo would be so perfect.

“Speaking of which, would you-“

“No.” Niki said, shaking her head. “If he makes it to the Autumn Court, I won’t block Schlatt. The Winter Court may have said they don’t care what happens as long as the mortal is out of the way, but they will favor their ally over us.”

“Ugh.” Karl said. He was reasonably certain Dream wouldn’t intervene especially if it was Sapnap asking but Schlatt was different. And what made Tubbo perfect even for someone as finicky as Quackity made him someone Schlatt would like too.

The things he did for his fiancés.

“I suppose I’ll just have to make sure he doesn’t get beyond the Spring Court.” Karl said. He’d feel awful about it, but he was sure future Tubbo would understand. Maybe he’d hop forward, just to check and get an early start on the adorable Changeling moments that would be due to him. Niki looked up and smiled at him. “Would you mind if I invited my fiancés over?”

“Not at all.”

If his sense of time was right, he was about a day into his first trial. And he was already certain something was up.

Tubbo leaned back, frowning at his task. It was just sorting various seeds apart, barley, wheat, and corn. No time limit. He couldn’t use any tools but it didn’t matter as *he had no time limit*. They even agreed on a no harm, interference with his sorting, or death clause and Niki told him he could just name a reasonable prize if he didn’t want the Charm.

He’d get done in another day, tops. Maybe a bit more, depending. But the weirdest part was the prize clause. Why would he want something other than the Charm?

It was incredibly suspicious. Tubbo idly sorted more corn into his corn pile, thinking. Why had he been given such an easy task?

“Hey Tubbo!” Tubbo jerked out of his thoughts, looking up. He reflexively smiled when he saw the familiar purple and green sweater.

He didn’t trust Karl at all but it was nice to have someone to talk to. If he closed his eyes and filtered out the most disturbing bits, it was almost like Tommy chattering at him while they worked on chores.

Suspicious, still. But he couldn’t pass up a free source of information who might let something slip that he could use later.

“Hey!” Tubbo said. His frown returned when he realized there were two strangers with Karl this time. He forced himself to stay relaxed and loose, not shrinking back into the awful cover of the seeds. The Interference clause was active but the Fae were tricky. Either way? He didn’t want to trigger some pounce instinct. “Who are they?”

“My fiancés!” Karl said, beaming. “The one with the golden wings is Quackity and the one with the white headband is Sapnap. Autumn Court and Summer Court! I almost have a complete set.”

Tubbo eyed them warily. It didn’t make him very confident to be so suddenly outnumbered. “Hello.” He said.

“They’ve got you doing the menial work?” Quackity said, stepping forward and examining his piles. Tubbo flushed red. Maybe a bit silly, but there was something about being faced with somebody dressed as a wealthy businessman that automatically made him feel like a poor boy scrubbing a corner.

It made Tubbo want to bite him for it.

“I’m sure something like this is easy for you with magic and all.” He said, waving a hand. He let voice drip with faux casualness and praising. Quackity looked pleased, something stirring in their eyes. “But it’s more fun this way.”

“Really?” Karl said, leaning in closer to examine the pile. His eyes glinted in curiosity.

“Absolutely.” Tubbo said, spreading his hands wide. Hey, there was no clause saying he couldn’t trick people into doing the work for him. “Have you really never tried doing it the mortal way? You’re missing out.”

“What makes it so different?” Karl said, leaning in closer. Hook, line, maybe sinker. Surely a Fae couldn’t be this easy to trick?

“Let me show you!” Tubbo said, keeping the same amiable smile on his face. “It’s pretty easy, but way different! First, you reach over here-”

“Well-“ Quackity gently smacked Karl’s hand down.

“He’s scamming you.” And then he said something in what was clearly another language, all ringing bells and soft breezes. Karl barked a short laugh even as Tubbo flinched back with wide eyes, his ears ringing.

“I told you sooooo.” Karl said, something clearly teasing. Quackity rolled his eyes, but his face was clearly fond as he said something in that chiming language again.

Tubbo tilted his head to the side, earning a side glance from Quackity. The other swapped back to... norma Common? Maybe? It’s not like he was even certain if they were speaking normal Common or there was some sort of translation spell in place. “We’ve talked about this, you shouldn’t believe everyone who is charming.”

“Hey!” Karl said, pouting. “I’m the Fae here! Trust me, I know a scheme. And believing someone charming is how I met you!”

“Sure.” And Tubbo averted his eyes away from the look of mushy love Quackity sent towards Karl. Ugh.

If they were trying to distract him, he felt like they might be succeeding. Which was worst than he had been hoping for. Tubbo forced himself to look back at his work, trying to ignore the little voice in the back of his skull screaming for him not to turn his back on a predator.

“I thought you said this kid was interesting.” Sapnap said. Tubbo inched back, worried by the look of irritation in the other Fae’s eyes when he briefly glanced up. “He doesn’t seem very interesting to me.”

Good, because he didn’t want to be interesting. Tubbo put his eyes back on his work, trying to avoid Sapnap’s gaze burning into his back.

The more interesting you were, the more likely you were to get completely fucked over. If Tubbo had his way, he’d be as bland as oatmeal to these people. The Fae were attracted to interesting people.

It was why the Winter Fae had taken Tommy, who shone like the sun. Tubbo had seen it a long time ago.

“Well, maybe you need to spend some more time together then.” Karl said. There was a strange look in his eyes when Tubbo looked back up, worried by the words. But no matter how his mind turned them over, he couldn’t figure out why they made him feel so much dread. “I bet you’ll find something in common!”

“And while you’re doing that, Karl and I will be going on a date.” Quackity said. Sapnap and Karl both went red for very different reasons. Tubbo’s mouth fell open. “Consider it compensation if this falls through.”

What did that mean? But before he could ask, Sapnap had reluctantly nodded and the other two had vanished.

Ah. That’s why he felt so worried.

Tubbo glanced at the spot where they were, unable to help the spark of curiosity at seeing such obvious signs of magic. When he was younger, he had been fascinated with the idea, of how magic could so easily twist the world.

But feeling the heat radiating off of Sapnap, he wasn’t so interested now.

Tubbo tried to focus on his work again but it was hard with that burning gaze on him. “I’m really not trying to be interesting.” He said, hands darting between piles. He didn’t even know why Karl kept coming back.

“But they’re interested in you.” Sapnap said. Tubbo frowned. How was this now his fault? This was some Fae arrogance, honestly. “I don’t agree, you’re dangerous.”

“Dangerous?” Tubbo parroted. Part of him preened at that. He liked people acknowledging he could be dangerous. But it was bizarre coming from a Fae. It was like a mountain lion accusing a mouse.

“You tried to manipulate Karl.” Sapnap said. The tree trunk he was holding onto began to blacken. “Tried to take advantage of him.”

“That’s double standards, big man.” Tubbo said, not even looking up. “Karl would do the exact same to me. And in all honesty, I don’t care if I’m taking advantage of any of you.”

He really didn’t. Karl was nice and all but Tommy was his friend. If getting Tommy back meant manipulating some people, so be it.

And he knew for a fact that his words were true. They wouldn’t hesitate to do the same to him. And Tubbo had the stories to prove it.

“How dare you.” Sapnap snarled, his eyes almost- no. Not almost. They were glowing, like the embers of a stoked fire. “Karl has been nothing but nice.”

“Good for him.” Tubbo said, tilting his head up to look at Sapnap. His eyes narrowed. “But I’m only here for one reason and that’s getting my friend back.”

If he had to take advantage of Karl to do it, he’d have no scruples about it.

“And your friend is worth my anger?” Sapnap said. Tubbo didn’t even glance at the smoldering tree. He already knew his answer, threats aside.

“Yes.” He said. After all, he wouldn’t have come if he feared the anger of the Fey. He wouldn’t have jumped off a mountain if he feared the anger of the Fey. He wouldn’t have escaped the Wild Hunt if he feared the anger of the Fey. “He’s worth everything.”

All at once, the fire died. Literally. The tree stopped smoldering, the sparks suddenly going out. Sapnap tilted his head to the side, looking at Tubbo with that same odd look. “Huh.” He said. “Okay then.”

“Uh.” Tubbo said, not quite sure what to say. He had a feeling something had changed. Clearly he had said something right. But he hadn’t even tried to manipulate Sapnap! “Okay.”

“So what are you working on?” Sapnap said, sitting down next to Tubbo. He could feel the heat waves radiating from him sitting this close.

“Sorting these.” Tubbo said. He looked at Sapnap, suspicious. “No sabotage.”

“Me? I would never. How dare you say that I would.” Sapnap said in the tone of someone who absolutely would have.

Silence. It was more comfortable than the awkward silence before, filled with the soft sounds of shifting grains. It stretched on for a few moments, and slowly, Tubbo could feel his guard beginning to slide.

“I have a friend too.” Sapnap said, softly. “Multiple, really. I’d do anything for them. We play games together all the time.”

“Good for them.” Tubbo murmured. Part of him wanted to stay quiet, to force them away. The other was more cognizant of the dangers of aggravating someone with such a high status. “You’re of the Summer Court, aren’t you?”

And maybe he was a little curious about the world of his stories. A little! And it would be beneficial too, if he could learn about his next Court.

“Is it that obvious?” Sarnap said. “I thought it would be harder to tell.”

“Well, considering sitting next to you feels like sitting next to a furnace and you mentioned games, a bit.” Tubbo said. He smiled mischievously. “Also, Karl said one of his fiancés lived in the Summer Court and Quackity didn’t seem like the type.”

“He’s not a fan of the games.” Sarnap said, chuckling. Tubbo side eyed him cautiously.

“What’s with the sudden personality change?” He said, trying to keep his hands moving. “Not that I’m objecting to not getting burned but you seem... calmer than earlier.”

“Oh, that.” Sarnap said carelessly as if he had already forgotten the blackened tree and harsh gaze. “Like I said, I’ll do anything for the people I care about. Karl and Quackity like you, I’d hate for you to abuse that.”

“And it mattered why I was doing this?” Tubbo asked, confused. Why was manipulation only bad if it wasn’t to get his friend back? It didn’t really seem like it should matter to the Fey his motives. It certainly hadn’t mattered to the Winter Court. It only made them angrier.

Sarnap waved a hand. “I like people who are loyal.” He said, smiling. “Anyways, let me tell you about our latest game-“

That still didn’t really answer his question but Tubbo let himself get drawn into the story anyways. It’s not like it would matter when he left. It made the time sorting grain go by faster.

Sarnap, Karl, and Quackity quickly became part of his hours. It felt like he was never really alone with one of the fiancés always by his side. On one hand, it was definitely a bit weird how they kept showing up.

But, Tubbo thought as he continued sorting the grains over the long hours, some story going in one ear and being carefully cataloged in the back of his mind. It was nice not to be alone. The town they had lived in wasn’t very safe, he and Tommy had always stuck together just in case. It had been a bit nerve wracking to be alone in the middle of the Veil.

He sighed, resting his head in his hands. The hours of sorting had left his eyes sore and head pounding. But he couldn’t stop now.

The more he sorted, the harder it got. He had been certain the task would take another day. But with his head pounding and the hours slipping by, he was much more worried now.

“You doing okay, birdie?” He heard Karl say, a hand resting on his head. Tubbo nodded, pushing the hand away.

“Fine.” He said. He didn’t elaborate, refusing to meet Karl’s concerned eyes.

Karl really was oddly nice for a Fae, had been the entire time Tubbo had known him. Yeah, their meeting hadn’t been the best and he was creepily uncaring about death, but he was nice.

He hadn’t tried to trick him or manipulate him for something. It was both terrifying and relieving. But right now, the paranoia that also came with it was making him even more miserable.

“You should take a break if you need one.” Karl said, his voice softening. “You won’t be able to finish the quest if you kill yourself in the beginning.”

“Says you.” Quackity said with a snort. “How many of your challenges did you do the exact same thing?”

“That’s different.” Karl said, flopping back so his head was in Quackity’s lap. Sapnap was gone again, where he was, Tubbo didn’t know. He had said something about asking a Dream for leave. “I’m a Fae and he’s mortal.”

“You know I worry for you both.” Quackity said. Tubbo gagged a bit as the two kissed, looking back to his sorting.

“Really? In front of where I’m trying to work?” He complained. Gods, they were worse than Helga and Miles. “Can you do that somewhere else?”

“Aw, what’s wrong with this?” Quackity said. Tubbo flushed. He might have shown his hand a bit too much. “I’m just showing my fiancé that I love him.”

“Quacks, stop.” Karl said, pushing Quackity’s head away. “I’m not going to make him uncomfortable. I know how honking embarrassing parents making out can be.”

“It’s fine.” Tubbo said. He paused to examine a particularly unclear grain, flinching as Karl ruffled his hair. He only relaxed when the other pulled away. “I was just joking around. The PDA is gross.”

Part of him squirmed a bit at the attention. No one had really cared much to hear what he had to say. It had benefited him but having someone constantly checking on him felt... weird.

Not to mention the way they had started casually touching him. Hair ruffles. Shoulder nudges. Side hugs. No one but Cornelius had touched him like that, and only very seldom.

“If you’re sure.” Quackity said, propping his chin on his hand. “So, anyways, I was talking to Schlatt about this one village-“

Tubbo kept sorting, keeping one ear on the story. Any information would be useful information. He hated being in the dark.

He flinched again as Karl set an idle hand on top of his head but the other didn’t remove it. Tubbo shook his head but the Fae still didn’t move, slowly combing a hand through his hair.

“Can you stop?” Tubbo said, turning to look at him. Karl should know he didn’t like having people’s hands near his head. Not after the multiple ‘accidents’ that happened in those nights. And the talks during the day.

“Sorry, it’s reflexive.” Karl said. “I fidget with things that are around me.”

“He does.” Quackity confirmed. “One time in a particularly boring meeting, he managed to braid my hair to Sapnap’s. How he did that without us noticing is a mystery.”

“I’ve got skills.” Karl said. Tubbo scowled, turning to look at his sorting. He was close to being done, he just had to get a bit farther.

“I heard my name, don’t wear it out.” Sapnap chimed in. Tubbo jumped and looked up, watching as the Summer Fae flopped down next to Quackity, leaning on the other.

“Ugh, get off, you’re sweaty.” Quackity claimed. “You’re so gross, man.”

“But you still love me.” Sapnap said, cheerily. Karl laughed and Tubbo yelped as a tangle in his hair got yanked, dragging his hands away from his sorting.

“Don’t make me honking laugh right now.” Karl said, shaking his head. Tubbo rolled his eyes, wincing only slightly as Karl scratched the spot that had gotten pulled.

“Rude! And after I had so kindly gotten Dream to let me off for a bit!” Sapnap said, placing his hands over his eyes. “Cruelly betrayed by my loves!”

“Really!” Karl said, perking up. “I wouldn’t have thought it would go so well! I- hey Tubbo can I braid your hair? It’s a little short but if I do this…”

Before Tubbo had even said anything, Karl was already beginning to braid.

It seemed to him like it would be easier to just stop touching him. He could have sworn Karl was more distant when he first met him, an observer just out of sight.

Maybe this was what Karl being comfortable looked like. He wasn’t sure if he liked or disliked it.

Tubbo made a soft noise, rubbing at his eyes. How was his village doing now? He must have wasted so much time here. Who knows what had happened?

“Everything alright? You’re looking stressed.” Quackity chimed in. “Maybe you should ask for a break.”

“No, I’m fine. I just need to finish this and get-“ Tubbo’s tongue stuttered over the word. His prize. He pressed his hand to his forehead, trying to push back the pain. He found himself wishing he could reach into his skull and rip out what was causing the pain. Why did it hurt so much?

There was a soft popping noise, the hand in his hair pulling away. “Owwwww, why did you do that?” Karl whined. “My love! Abusing me!”

“You’re pushing too far.” Quackity said. Tubbo blinked tears out of his eyes, staring at the seeds in front of him.

It would get better.

It had to get better. He’s been through way worse.

Tubbo knew it was a distraction. But he could manage five minutes. Over half the piles were sorted and this?

This was amazing.

He watched the massive bee crawl around his hands, marveling at its beauty. He had dreamed of something like this happening. And his head felt clearer than it had in ages, with a break from sorting grain. “You’re perfection.” he told it. “Never change. I demand it.”

“Do you want to keep it?” Quackity asked, propping his chin up on his hand. But he made no move to move closer to it. When Karl had brought the bees over, Quackity had just as hastily slid away. Even from Karl, who had his own bee crawling around his hand. A possible weakness?

Tubbo pondered this before replying. “No, not after what happened to the banking bee.” He said, shaking his head. He couldn’t bear to lose another. Let it remain a tragic loss, not to be replaced.

“How’s the head?” Sapnap asked. He was leaning over Karl’s shoulder, alternating looks between the bee and Tubbo. Tubbo couldn’t help the frown at the sudden shift in subject.

“Never better.” He lied. Never show weakness to the Fae. Because in all honesty, it was getting worse. The migraines were starting to come more often and were slower to leave each time. It had already added too much time onto his careful calculations.

But how could he admit it to them? His aim was already affected by the pain. If he was challenged, he’d have no way to defend himself.

“Tubbo, are you lying to us?” Quackity said, leaning forward. His dark eyes suddenly looked even darker, to the point Tubbo had to force himself to look away. It felt like the other could see right through him.

Maybe he could. The Fae had always had strange abilities. What was another to them?

“I’m not.” Tubbo lied, bringing the bee closer to the ground and watching reluctantly as it crawled off. He reached again for the pile of seeds, ignoring the pain echoing across his head and the three staring at him in disapproval.

This was fine. It had to be fine. Just a bit longer. His calculations told him he was going to be done soon. It’s not like it would interfere with him too much if the three stuck around for a bit longer. Even if he wasn’t sure why they stuck around.

At least the stories made it easier to forget about the pain, even through his brain fogging up from sorting.

But he had the oddest feeling he had forgotten something. Something important.

He didn't like it. Maybe if he listened more, he'd remember.

Tubbo opened his hand, staring down at the wheat seed.

What had he been doing, messing about with this? He frowned, surveying the piles in front of him. Some kind of fairytale task? It was the first thing he could think of. But no matter how much he racked his brain, he couldn't remember the how or the why.

Worry rose in his chest. It was never a good sign to suddenly forget what he was doing. He couldn't remember any, but he was pretty sure any stories beginning with amnesia and a half finished unknown task didn't end well. Maybe he didn't know any because they hadn't ended well.

"Tubbo!" A ringing sound like windchimes in the wind and Tubbo froze, eyes coming up to rest on the stranger who had just walked into the clearing. Their powerful looking gold wings flared, ruffling slightly under Tubbo's scrutinizing gaze.

They flashed him a smile, gold winking in the light. Tubbo's frown became deeper, shifting past him to look at the more familiar figure behind him. Karl. But what was Karl doing, bringing a stranger into his clearing?

"Who are you?" Tubbo said, bringing his hands up as he stared at the man with the golden wings. Something in his brain was ringing like a bell, telling him that the person in front of him was a threat.

Maybe even connected to how he had appeared in this clearing. Tubbo's eyes darted to Karl, seeing worry and confusion cross their face. What was this whole thing even about?

"I-" The stranger turned to Karl, saying something in a chiming language that made Tubbo flinch back. What was that? A curse? Something to trip him up, like the landscapes in the Pit? He'd like to see this person try to defeat him, he'd shoot him down like the others?

"Whoops." Karl said, looking chagrined. "I didn't mean for it to go that far, with him forgetting you. But on the bright side, it works?"

"You said you knew what you were doing." Tubbo started to sidle back as the black-haired man slapped a hand against his face. "Ay, how long will it take to fix this? I worked so hard to get into his good graces!"

They started to turn back around-

Tubbo turned and bolted. He had no idea who this stranger was, and he was not going to be risking his life to be dealing with this. Behind him, he heard a cry of shock but he ignored it,

plunging into the sunlit glade.

And then slamming right into a very warm body. Tubbo staggered back like a frightened rabbit, eyes squinting at who he crashed into. He frowned. “Ugly?” He said. The familiar person’s face twisted. “No, it was changed to Grievous... wasn’t it?”

His head throbbed, making Tubbo moan with pain as he pressed a hand to his head, beginning to sway. “Oh, I honking messed this up.” He heard Karl mumble, warm hands beginning to pull him down by the shoulders. Tubbo tries to swat them away, but they keep pulling.

Why not, he thought muzzily, letting himself fall to the ground with a thump only eased by the hands that caught him. His head hurt already. What else could they do but shoot him? But wait, Robin thought. He died by hanging, didn’t he? No, what was he... Pain shot across his head, making his very thoughts echo with pain.

“Hey, man, maybe you should stop.” He heard Grievous say, warm hands folding over the ones on his head. “You’ve got him pretty mixed up now. Maybe we back off?”

“It’s okay, Sapnap.” Karl assured. Why was he calling Mason Sapnap, Percy wondered. Nobody called Mason Sapnap. But the other sounded so confident and with his head hurting so much, he couldn’t seem to think though it. “I definitely got this. I’m not winging this at all.”

“It’s fine.” An unfamiliar voice interrupted. “After a bit, we can start trading off on our magic and Karl’s influence will ease off a bit. That way, our little Changeling will have a little bit of each of us and the effect on his memories should dissipate.”

What did that mean? Jackie wondered. The words sparked an ominous feeling of dread in his chest, even more so than when he was informed of the competition. But the warm hands cradling his head seemed to steal every thought away.

“Maybe I want to keep him for myself for a bit.” Karl said. He squirmed, trying to move his head away from the encroaching hands. “I was the one who found him first.”

“Yeah, and now we get more time with him to keep it fair.” Sap-Miles-Ugly said, chuckling slightly. Robi-Percy made a soft whining sound, the pain in his head making it hard to talk. It felt like every inch of his head was pulsing, breaking apart in a mirage of pain.

Was this life? Or was he already dead? Robin was dead, but Percy and Jackie weren’t. Who was dead? Why was he here?

“You’re so mean to me.” Karl mumbled. His hands pulled away from Jack-Percy-Robi-his forehead, leaving him suddenly adrift. “And right as we’re adopting our cute little Changeling too! I’ve been putting in so much work for this!”

“I know, and we appreciate it. You’ve done a great job with him. Sapnap-” an odd sound like a bell “-rock, paper, scissors for it? One of us needs to take over soon, even him out. He’s

already on the cusp of it, we need to make sure this works out just right. Three parents isn't common."

A loving sigh. "We are going to be such good parents. I can't wait to see what he turns out as, with all of our claims."

Rock, paper, scissors, Tubbo thought. What an awful way to figure out who got to add their Changeling claim next. But with his head in agony, all the strength had seemed to drift away from his mental grasp, leaving him empty and only able to listen to the three cheerily chattering above his head.

And his own thoughts. The newfound clarity seemed to mock him.

Ah.

That's what he forgot.

Tommy.

Chapter End Notes

be careful the paths you choose, lest you slip InBetween

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